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"THE TIME HAS SEEMED LONG TO ME SINCE WE PARTED, MISS ARDEN!" SAID SIR RALPH.

MY LOVE STORY.

[A NOVELETTE.]

It is a brilliant moonlight night in May. I am standing alone at one of the open windows in the spacious and handsome drawing-room at my Cousin Maude's in Balgravia (for my father has at length been prevailed upon by Lady Merton to allow me to taste, for a brief spell, all the delights of a London season).

I am standing with my silken skirts flowing around me, and with the scent of the handsome bouquet I hold in one hand stealing up to me, as the gentle evening breeze stirs faintly the scented petals.

And the moonlight floods the whole scene, and I do not know why, but it makes me think of Elmleigh—my father's parish; and then I remember Clifford Ralston, the young doctor, to

whom I am engaged, and whom I love passionately, and wonder what he would think of me could he but see me now, arrayed in my charming evening dress.

"I wish he could see me," I tell myself, with a little pardonable vanity, for the long *cheval* glass in my room had reflected a very pretty, flushed face, and a charming *petite* figure as I had passed before it several times that evening before descending to my Cousin Maude's presence. She is so severe respecting one's appearance, and she has determined—she tells me—that I shall make an early conquest of some one of the aristocratic men who attend her receptions, balls, and so forth.

And I had listened to her ambitious views for myself, and laughed softly and secretly as I remember Clifford, my own true love, whom I have left in dear Elmleigh, and from whom I am hoping to receive a letter by the next post.

"I wonder what Clifford is doing now! I wonder if he is thinking of me!" I continue.

"Why, Madge, whom are you addressing!"

breaks in my Cousin Maude's voice, and then her hand is laid on mine as she continues,—

"Come away from the open window, Madge, at once. The nights are still chilly, and I must not allow you to run the risk of taking cold now, just when Sir Ralph is expected to-night; and you know what he thinks of my little country cousin's singing!"

And the clear tones are followed by a well-satisfied laugh, as my cousin draws one of my hands within hers, and turns to lead me away.

But at that instant a breeze springs up, and the fresh air stealing in, wafts the scent of the fragrant flowers lying at my feet, and bears it upwards.

"Madge, take care! Do you not see you have dropt your flowers! What would Sir Ralph say if he were to arrive at this moment, and find his flowers so neglected!"

"I am very sorry, Cousin Maude. I had quite forgotten them, I believe. Poor things, they are not much hurt, though!" I return, laughingly, as I stoop and pick up the bouquet I had dropped

in my fit of abstraction when dwelling upon my absent lover.

"Madge, I can't understand you!" exclaims my cousin, as she follows me across the room, and seats herself by my side on one of the satin-lined couches.

"In what particular respect, Cousin Maude?" I laughingly ask.

"Why you are so perfectly indifferent to Sir Ralph Darrel's attentions, while most girls of your age would be nearly wild with pride and delight to think that they had secured the best part of the season."

"But I have not yet secured him, Cousin Maude," I replied mischievously.

"Not quite yet, certainly, Madge; but the chance is yours, as much as though the actual words had been spoken. And it will be so nice for us both, Madge, dear! Sir Ralph's country-seat in Midlandshire is a splendid place, and I shall be so glad to join you there for a little spell of quiet and repose; for really, Madge, I find a season now quite tiring enough. It was so different when dear Lord Merton was alive. He managed so many things for me, but now I am quite alone."

As my cousin concludes, she draws forth her delicate lace handkerchief, and wipes carefully and cautiously her fine eyes.

I am spared a reply to this speech, which I deem rather premature, considering Sir Ralph Darrel has never spoken a word to me, that all the world might not hear.

But then of course, I argue, I am young, and having been so country-bred, what can I possibly know of the manner in which such as Sir Ralph and his aristocratic and town-seasoned colleagues conduct their wooing of the fair Belgravian maidens.

Again, Clifford and I are so unsophisticated and rusticated, evidently; for we—

But why describe the embraces, or repeat the sweet phrases that we employ? They are sacred to us!

To return.

I am sorely puzzled how to reply when the door opens, and Sir Ralph himself is announced by the tall footman in crimson plush. Cousin Maude is so addicted to bright and showy colours, and is herself this evening resplendent in old gold and crimson.

It is her reception-evening, and Sir Ralph has hardly paid his homage to his handsome hostess ere others are announced.

The room fills fast, and I am soon the centre of a smiling, and admiring group, but Sir Ralph always contrives to place himself at my side.

Cousin Maude's fine eyes fairly blaze with triumph and delight, as she notes his presence in such continual proximity to myself, as she from time to time passes in and out among her guests.

"The conservatory has but few occupants, Madge," she murmurs once.

Simple enough words, but I think I understand their meaning.

A crimson flush of annoyance and shame floods my face for an instant, and then—I remember Clifford!

And the hot and hasty anger dies away, as I recollect that I have brought all this upon myself by not telling my cousin of my engagement to Clifford Ralston.

But then I would rather bear anything than see her scornful looks! I am so young and inexperienced!

"You find the room too warm, Miss Arden?"

"I believe I do, Sir Ralph," I reply.

"I know of a delightfully cool spot if you will allow me to conduct you there!" my companion continues.

"I shall be very grateful, Sir Ralph," I return.

Placing my gloved hand within his arm I let him lead me to an open window, and from thence to a seat on the covered balcony.

"How deliciously fresh and cool it is here, Sir Ralph!" I exclaim, seating myself on one of the low chairs.

"I am glad Miss Arden approves of the change," Sir Ralph replies, gravely.

And then, glancing up at the fine, tall figure

of my escort, as he leans against the iron balustrade of the balcony, and noting the expression on his face, I become aware of what I had done in thus allowing him to lead me away from the crowded rooms.

What shall I answer him when he— But he is speaking, even while I am ruminating as to a suitable reply!

"Miss Arden, I cannot be sufficiently grateful to you for thus giving me the opportunity for which I have sought in vain for the past week."

I glance up at the face bent towards me, and read in the dark eyes what is to follow.

"Oh, Sir Ralph!" I exclaim, hastily, and letting his fingers (which I still held) fall again to the floor, "I have been very wrong! I know it now! but I did not think!"

"Your flowers, Miss Arden," he replies, stooping low to pick them up as he speaks.

I bow and receive the same; but I shiver perceptibly as I do so.

"Miss Arden," continues my companion, "I should not have dared to take you away from the others had it not been for these," touching with one hand the fair white flowers resting on my lap.

I am silent; for I feel how wrongly I had acted.

"But I must speak now, Miss Arden, and tell you how I have admired you from the first moment that I met you—now nearly six months ago! Dear Miss Arden! will you not give me some hope that you will accept me some day as your husband?"

My husband! Did I hear the words aright! I, who am already the affianced bride of another! But it is all my own doing that this man now stands before me declaring his love for me. All my own fault!

"Miss Arden, I trust I have not offended you!"

What must I reply! Shall I tell him the whole truth! I am nearly puzzled. But my companion's next words aid me a little.

"Don't give me an answer now if you do not wish to do so. I can wait awhile your decision. Only tell me that I have not offended you, Miss Arden, by speaking of my admiration—my love for you!"

There is such humility in the tone—in the manner—that it stings me to the quick to think how I have deceived this man! And yet I had told myself that he couldn't care for me, as Cousin Maude declares, because he spoke in soft words. I am inexperienced, truly, and he is a man of from forty-five to fifty.

"Offended, Sir Ralph! How can I be, when it is all—"

And then I hesitate and flush deeply.

"Thank you, Miss Madge. I will not press you for an answer now, but will give you time for reflection. Should you like to join the others again, Miss Madge? I shall get scolded if I monopolise thus the belle of Lady Merton's rooms!"

I simply bowed, and, rising, took the proffered arm in silence.

Just as my companion draws aside the curtain at the entrance to the gay and crowded rooms, I almost whispered, as I looked up pleadingly into my escort's face: "Please do not let Cousin Maude know!"

"Miss Arden can trust me in all things," comes the low-spoken reply, as his dark eyes return my pleading look.

"Ah, here are the truant!" Cousin Maude exclaims, as we re-enter the room.

"I feared a scolding, Lady Merton," says Sir Ralph, glancing meanwhile at me.

"Shall I scold Sir Ralph, Madge!" whispers my cousin to me, and there is such a meaning look in her fine eyes, that I felt inclined to reply in like strain.

"Not Sir Ralph, Cousin Maude. I deserve the scolding if either; for I wished to quit these hot rooms for a time, and Sir Ralph was good enough to bear me company."

"And now you must pay the forfeit for your long absence, and favour my guests with a song, Sir Ralph, you would like some music!"

Lady Merton already knows how passionately I am attached to music; and Miss Arden has so

many times heard me express my admiration of her charming voice.

"You will spoil my little cousin with flattery, Sir Ralph!" laughingly exclaims Cousin Maude as she accompanies Sir Ralph and myself to the grand piano at the further end of the inner drawing-room.

I sing repeatedly; song after song—Clifford's favourites included,—sing till Cousin Maude persists that I shall be asked for no more that evening.

And so the hours speed by, fraught with many a triumph for Cousin Maude, and much admiration and attention for myself.

But none of the brilliant throng would recognise the smiling and charming Madge Arden in the poor tear-stained faced girl crouching at the side of the pretty French bed later on!

For now the excitement is fairly over I realise fully what I have done; and tears and bitter repentance, mingled with longings for home and Clifford, burst from my full and burdened heart!

"Only a few more days, and I shall once again see my dear father and Clifford!" I murmur, as I at length seek my pillow, and dream confused and mixed dreams of Sir Ralph Darrel and my lover—Clifford Ralston.

"Very glad, indeed, to see my little Madge at home once more!" exclaims my father for the twentieth time, as he regards me across the small tea-table with his dear, tender eyes.

"And I am more than glad to be at home again," I respond warmly.

"But my little Madge enjoyed her visit!" questions my father anxiously.

"Very, very much, dear father!"

"Ah! I do not expect there were many who failed to recognise what a charming little creature Lady Merton's cousin is!" exclaims my father, fondly.

"Now, father dear, no flattery, if you please, sir. I have had quite enough of that commodity lately, and I am getting quite tired of and surfeited with it."

Then suddenly changing my tone I ask,—

"And Clifford, father! Tell me again why he was not at the station to meet me. I scarcely heard his excuse just now: I was so taken up with you, dear father."

Clifford was very disappointed and vexed not to be here to join his welcome with mine; but, unfortunately, he was sent for to a distant farmhouse to attend a case, and so could not be present, but he hopes to look in upon his return to— But here he comes. I am going out to visit poor old Granny Stokes; she is failing fast.

My father leaves the house as Clifford enters it.

And then—

Oh! the delight at once again finding my dear one's arms around me, and to have his kisses showered upon my lips!

"Oh! Clifford, Clifford!" I almost sob. "I am so glad to be with you again."

"And I have so longed for your return, Madge!" comes the answer in earnest, passionate tones.

Then I glance aly up at my lover, and am struck anew with his handsome face and fine figure. Of course I have always considered him handsome, but now his good looks seem to be enhanced, as I mentally contrast him with Sir Ralph Darrel and others whom I have left behind me in aristocratic Belgravia.

"What is it, Madge?" Clifford asks presently; as, thinking my own thoughts, I still continue absently to gaze at my lover's face.

I lower my eyes then and blush.

"Tell me, Madge!" he pleads, bending down his face to mine.

"I did not realise before how good-looking you are, Clifford!" I stammer forth.

"Ah! Madge, Madge, you have learnt the art of flattery, then, from your town-bred acquaintances!" laughingly returns my lover. Then adds, "I want you to come out with me to our favourite seat in the orchard, and then I must hear all particulars respecting this wonderful visit. Will you come, Madge?"

Before he has fairly concluded his request spring away to fetch a hat and wrap.

A few minutes later and we are treading the small gravel path which leads to the orchard.

"How sweet the roses are!" I exclaim, as side by side we pass the small rosery (my dear father's hobby), and the fragrance of the crimson, pink, and white petals is wafted to us by the gentle evening breeze.

The sun is just setting in the western horizon, and leaving in his wake gorgeous streaks of crimson and gold.

"You do not get such roses as these in London, I expect!" replies Clifford.

"I have had no roses this summer," I said.

"Then let me bear the blame of plucking one of Mr. Arden's special 'beauties'!"

So saying, Clifford bends forward and gathers a lovely deep-hearted crimson bud from a neighbouring bush.

"What a beauty!" I exclaim. "And how I shall treasure it; it being the first I have received this season; and also because it was given me by you!"

"Keep it, darling, till our wedding-day, and then I will replace it by others fresher and fairer!" whispers my lover, as he holds open the wicket-gate leading into the orchard. On through the long grass beneath the trees, whose green fruit was just beginning to show amid the leaves. We stroll on and on till the spot is reached. Here is the "patriarch" of the orchard; an old, gnarled and hoary trunk, with branches bent and twisted, so as to form a species of bowser.

"Now for a nice quiet talk, Madge!" Clifford exclaims, as we seat ourselves, side by side, on the bent branch.

For all reply, I lean back against the hoary trunk, and sigh—a sigh of perfect content and happiness. For oh! it is so grand to be once more at dear old Elmleigh; to be once again in the presence of my dear love!

"What a sigh, Madge! For which of your late admirers is that intended?"

"Clifford!" in surprised and indignant tones; but a blush suffuses my face as I remember Sir Ralph Darrel.

"My darling, I was only jesting. But I want you to tell me that you still love me as much as ever. I have never doubted you, Madge, for one single moment; not even though your letters have been few and far between, but—"

"Oh! Clifford, I meant to have written so much oftener; but Cousin Maude—"

"Never mind that now, darling. I am not going to find fault with my dear little Madge, only I should like to hear once again from her lips that she still loves me," Clifford continues, as he draws me still nearer him.

"Clifford, I do love you—and more than ever if that is possible," I reply in low, earnest tones, glancing up, meanwhile, into my dear one's face. "Are you satisfied now, Clifford?" I ask presently after an interval of silence, during which Clifford has looked fixedly down the green and leafy perspective.

Still no reply.

"Clifford, what is it?" I question, anxiously.

"My darling! I was thinking over a dream I have had lately. Nay, do not laugh, Madge," he breaks off to add, noting the smile breaking over my face. "Do not laugh, please. For oh! it seemed so real—so terribly real!—that I had so longed to hear from your lips that you really and truly love me still. Will you repeat your words once again, dear one?"

"I glance in surprise at my lover's face, but as I look I repeat my words,—"

"Clifford, I do love you—and more, if that is possible!"

"Thank Heaven! It is only a dream!" Issues from his lips, and he breathes a sigh of relief at the same instant.

"What was your dream, Clifford?"

"It is not worth relating now, my darling," he replies.

"But I do so want to know, Clifford!" I plead.

"And I so want to know how my darling has enjoyed her visit, and what she has seen and done during the time," retorts my lover.

The words are lightly spoken, but the manner is firm.

And so I press my questioning no further, but complying with his wish, I answer brightly and cheerfully,—

"Oh! Cousin Maude was so kind to me, and took me everywhere with her. That is why you got so few letters from me, because there seemed something for every hour—nay, every moment—of the day; and then, after dinner, we always attended balls, concerts, receptions, or routs. I never enjoyed myself so much in all my life before! But throughout it all, Clifford, I wished you had been with me."

"To have one more admirer of you as you appeared in your sweet dresses, eh, Madge?" my lover laughingly asks.

"How can you, sir!" I snap. "Of course I missed you terribly!"

"I know you did, Madge. And now one more kiss from your dear lips, and then I will take you back to the house!"

One more long, passionate embrace, and then together Clifford and I retrace our steps through dewy grass, and "neath the star-spangled sky, through the wicket-gate, and up the gravel path, and at length the hall-door is reached.

"You will come in, Clifford!" I ask, as I turn the handle and open the door.

"Not to-night, Madge. My mother will be expecting me. I promised her I would not be late."

"I have been so selfish, Clifford. I have never once inquired for your mother!"

"I will excuse you to her, dear, since I have so engrossed your attention," Clifford laughingly replies. Then continues: "My mother sent her kindest love, and she will be so glad to see you when you can find time to call. She is very anxious to hear of your doings among the gay set you have been visiting in Belgravia."

"Please give her my love, Clifford; and I will certainly come and see her as soon as possible!"

"Thank you, Madge. Now one more sweet good-night, and then we must part for the present."

"Good-night! dear, dear Clifford!" I answer, standing on tiptoe to kiss my dear one's handsome face!

One fond and lingering embrace, and then we part. I listen to his firm tread till it dies away in the distance; then I turn away indoors, and the hall-door closes upon me.

"I will write to Cousin Maude to-morrow!" I tell myself, as I walk along towards the quaint old church.

It is a lovely June morning, and I do not hurry myself, even though the bell is giving notice by its slower and more dulcet tones that it will soon stop, and the service will commence.

My father is already in the small vestry putting on his white robes, for I can see the same fluttering in the summer breeze through the partially opened door.

Still I do not hurry; the spell of a perfect summer morn is on me, and I feel it is good to be sauntering slowly along in the sweet, pure sunshine.

But the bell ceases presently, and then I reflect how much averse my father is to my being late, so I quicken my steps, and am soon within the cool church-porch.

One moment to readjust and pull the curl which has gone fluttering astray, and then my hand is on the latch.

"Allow me," says a voice close by, while a hand, cased in a delicate and well-fitting glove, is stretched forth from behind me.

I drop my fingers, the door opens, and without turning my head, but merely bowing in recognition of the service rendered me, I pass on through the door, and, with heightened colour and downcast look, take my seat in the vicarage pew.

As I do so I become conscious that the owner of the delicate kid-gloved hand is being ushered by the old clerk into the Ellertons' pew.

Colonel Ellerton is the lord of the manor, and

is looked up to with considerable awe and reverence by all my father's parishioners.

"Some friend of the Colonel's," I tell myself as I catch just one glimpse of the bowed head as I rise from my knees, and prepare to join in the singing of the first psalm.

And then my thoughts wander; and for the time, forgetful of everything, I give full compass to my voice, and as I do so, I unconsciously glance in the direction of the Ellertons' pew.

One glance—and then, with crimsoning face, I break off abruptly and suddenly in the refrain, and drop my eyes quickly upon my Prayer Book, for the form standing so upright in old Colonel Ellerton's pew is the form of Sir Ralph Darrel! And he has recognised me and I him! And Clifford is sitting with his mother not many seats back, and he must have seen the exchanged glances. Quick as lightning these thoughts flash across my brain.

Still more and more crimson becomes my face, as I wonder how I shall explain all satisfactorily to my two lovers!

How can I confess to the one that I have acted wrongly in allowing him to suppose for an instant that my decision might be in his favour, when all the time I was the promised bride of the other!

Ah me! Why did I not openly confess to Cousin Maude my secret, and thus have secured freedom from the attention of others!—of such attentions as Sir Ralph Darrel showered upon me upon every possible occasion!

But all this time, while I am indulging in such perplexing thoughts, the service is proceeding, and finally we rise from our knees to sing the hymn before the sermon.

And then there is a slight rustle from behind, a faint and subdued murmur of voices, followed by steps going down the aisle in the direction of the church door.

I turn my head just in time to see one of my father's oldest parishioners being carried out, and Clifford following in the wake of the bearers.

For a few seconds everyone's attention is taken up by this sudden illness of poor old Farmer Hobbs, and then the door closes upon the small procession, and, quiet being once again established, we proceed with the singing of the hymn.

Will my father's sermon never come to an end?

I ask myself this repeatedly, as I sit alone in the vicarage pew with continually changing countenance, and think of the ordeal awaiting me. If only I can meet him when Clifford is not present; and then, perhaps, he need never know aught of the affair! For, honourable man as I believe him to be, I feel sure he will disappear from my path as soon as he has heard the truth from my lips. And I would, oh, so much! that the truth could be told before Clifford's suspicions are awakened!

"Thirdly, my dear brethren," my father remarks in his clear tone—but how slow are the tones! I can bear it no longer.

Rising hastily, I gather up my sunshade and book, and retrace my steps down the aisle, regardless of the astonished faces surging around me. Oa till the door is reached, then through it, and out into the summer air once more.

"If only Sir Ralph were here, I would tell him all before—"

"Miss Arden! Can I render you any assistance?"

Even before I have well finished my mental wish, Sir Ralph is at my side, with anxious face and extended arm.

"Thank you, Sir Ralph!" I murmur, as I allow my gloved fingers to rest lightly on the proffered arm.

"Do not think me very foolish," I continue, "but I believe I found the heat too great; and then my father's sermon is longer than usual this morning. I do not like too long a sermon, do you, Sir Ralph?" I question with a forced lightness in my tone, and with quickly changing countenance.

My companion regards me with a slight astonishment on his face, then replies,—

"I am glad your indisposition is no more than

may be attributed to the heat, Miss Arden. It certainly was very warm in the church; and then that poor old man's sudden illness may have—

"Yes, yes, Sir Ralph. That and the heat combined made me feel that I could sit still no longer, and so I came out."

"And now, since I am so fortunate as to have this opportunity of rendering you a slight service you will allow me to see you to your home, Miss Arden!"

"Ah! I had not considered everything! Had not considered that even though Clifford might not meet us on the way to the Vicarage, yet we must pass his home, and he may have returned from Farmer Hobbs! Still I can't refuse Sir Ralph as escort, be the consequences what they may."

So I murmur forth a few words in compliance with his request, and then we turn off together down the hot and dusty road.

No sign of Clifford at window or on the smooth green lawn.

I sigh a low sigh of relief, and my spirits return in full force.

"I am expecting Lady Merton to-morrow, Sir Ralph," I remark, as I note how near we are to the Vicarage.

"Yes, Miss Arden. How charming Lady Merton will find the country after the hot London streets! I am perfectly revelling in the fresh air and country scenes."

"Are you making a long stay in the neighbourhood, Sir Ralph?" I ask.

My companion starts slightly, hesitates a second, then bending his face towards me, he replies, very gravely,—

"My stay in this lovely and charming neighbourhood depends upon one thing alone, Miss Arden."

"What is that?" is the question that naturally occurs to me, but I dare not put it—cannot summon up sufficient courage to ask the question, when I know so well from tone, words and manner what the answer will be! Know so well that his stay depends solely upon me! No, I cannot ask it. And yet he seems to expect that I shall.

"Yes," Sir Ralph continues after a brief spell of silence. "I shall hope that the one circumstance which will decide whether I depart or remain may prove favourable."

Then turning again to me, and suddenly arresting his steps, he pursues in quicker, but in lower and more earnest tones,—

"Miss Arden, will you not hope with me that I may have the chance of visiting all the special bits of Elmsleigh scenery?"

This time I must give an answer of some kind or the other. Too well I know that an affirmative reply will be construed into a deeper meaning, and so I am nonplussed.

"Give me my answer, Miss Arden, quickly, please. I see others are approaching, and I want a reply before we are overtaken by them!"

"I cannot give it you now, Sir Ralph, but—"

"Thank you, Miss Arden; later on will do. After service this evening, perhaps. I shall attend it, and will meet you in the churchyard, and then you will give it me. Now," as the Vicarage gates are reached, "I will bid you farewell for the present, Miss Arden."

Bowing courteously, Sir Ralph opens the gate for me and then turns away.

And I! I scarcely know how I compose myself sufficiently to go forward and greet Clifford, who just at that moment emerges from the open drawing-room window.

"Clifford! you here!" I exclaim, rather abruptly.

"Yes, dear. I could not be of much service to poor old Farmer Hobbs. I have prescribed for him, and his friends will see that my orders are carried out. But, Madge, I am very sorry I shall not see anything more of you to day, for I found a note awaiting me on my return to say that Mrs. Leynton's eldest child is much worse, and I must go at once. But I could not set off without seeing my little Madge, and telling her how disappointed I am that I shall not be able to spend my Sunday afternoon with her."

"I am very sorry too, Clifford," I reply; but

even as I utter the words, my face gradually clears, and I am afraid I show my sudden sense of relief—from what?—too plainly, for Clifford replies very gravely,—

"I hope you are, dear. I shall think of you all the time, and perhaps I may be able to get back in time to spend an hour or two with you in our favourite spot."

"I hope you will, Clifford."

The words are not heartily spoken; for I remember Sir Ralph Darrel's question and my promised answer. Ah, well! Fate is deciding for me.

"Good-bye, my darling!" says Clifford, presently, and then lip meets lip, and eye looks into eye, but mine is dropped slightly before my lover's earnest scrutiny. Clifford notes it, for with a half-suppressed sigh he murmurs once again: "Good-bye, my darling," then turns away to his own home.

Dinner is partaken of.

The long afternoon hours pass by all too quickly for me, and then once again the old familiar church bell strikes forth to warn me that once again I must meet Sir Ralph Darrel, and that the moment when I must explain all is drawing very, very near!

With trembling fingers and anxious heart I array myself in my outdoor things, and then set forth down the dusty road.

I am very early, and when I enter the church there is no sign of Sir Ralph in Colonel Ellerton's pew.

The bell ceases, the church fills, and the service proceeds, but still no sign of Sir Ralph. I breathe more freely and begin to regain confidence, and almost flatter myself that he has altered his mind, and that our church will not number him as one of its worshippers this evening, when, just as the first hymn is being sung, his tall form appears down the aisle and enters the Ellerton pew!

Alas for me!

I am only dimly conscious of what is being sung; I cannot see the words, and their sense is borne to me from afar, so it seems, so confused I become as I reflect on the confusion awaiting me.

But the service ends at length, and to my great relief, as my father is about to leave the pulpit, I see the clerk approach him, and in a loud whisper I hear him distinctly inform him that he is wanted in the village.

Clifford away at Mrs. Leynton's, my father safely within some cottage home, what a chance is mine! I rise, and with one swift glance at Sir Ralph, I mix with the outpouring congregation, and so out into the evening air.

Sir Ralph joins me presently, and then silently we turn off down a narrow lane which branches off from the dusty high road, leading to my home, just below the church gate.

Half-way down there is a rustic stile, giving entrance to a field, and just across the fence is the residence of Farmer Hobbs, whose illness had so disturbed us all earlier in the day.

I think of this still as I walk silently along by Sir Ralph Darrel's side, and mentally determine that there—at the stile—shall the explanation take place.

We are fast approaching it, when suddenly the silence that has fallen betwixt us is broken by my companion.

"Miss Arden—Miss Madge! What a contrast these two interviews will present!"

"What do you mean, Sir Ralph?" I ask.

He draws nearer my side and lowers his head as the low reply is given.

"Do you not remember that night in May when you and I were together alone on the balcony?"

"Oh, Sir Ralph, I have brought you here purposely to tell you how wrongly I then acted! I am very—very sorry; indeed I am!"

I rush impetuously into my explanation, for I am dreading a renewal of his protestations of love for me—for me, the affianced of Clifford Darrel!

"Why should you thus blame yourself, Miss Madge!" he continues. "I was anxious, of course, to hear my sentence from your lips, but

I could not expect but that you should require a little time for decision; and I am here now to repeat any protestation of love that I may then have made, and to receive your answer. I put it, if you remember, in another form this morning. Do you recollect, Miss Madge?"

"Oh, Sir Ralph, please let me tell you how wrongly I have acted; and then—then you—"

"I can get no farther; my agitation is too great."

The friendly stile is reached, and leaning my head on its topmost bar, I lower my face, and the tears will flow.

"Miss Madge! What is it? Ah, I see this has been too much for you. I should have remembered your indisposition of this morning. Forgive me, please; I will not expect your answer to-night. To-morrow, perhaps, or another time, when you—"

"No, no, Sir Ralph! You must hear all to-night—now, this very minute!—and when you have heard all you will care for me no more!" I hurriedly exclaim, lifting my tear-stained face to him.

But the tender look in my companion's eyes renders my task more arduous than I had at first imagined it. Of course I knew he would be sorry; but I did not dream him capable of such love for me—for me, a little country-bred maiden, and he an *habitué* of and dweller amid the fairest and most aristocratic of the *Belgravia monde*!

I had deemed him cold and indifferent, and callous to love's soft imagery, because he had not poured into my ears like speeches such as the generality of Cousin Maude's men guests treated me to; and now the face bending down to mine is radiant with the light that love alone can produce. And that love is for me!

"Miss Madge," he replies, slowly—but so earnestly—"the moment when I shall cease to care for you will never arrive. The moment when I may no longer love you may arrive if—I am fated to be too late! But that I earnestly hope is not the case. I have been behind the scenes a little, and Lady Merton led me to believe that I need fear no—"

"But she knew nothing of it, for I have never told her! I wish I had done so, and then we should not be here now, Sir Ralph!"

I have spoken plainly enough this time. I see at a glance that my meaning is understood and grasped by my listener.

The bright look in his face fades quickly, and a pained and troubled expression replaces it.

"Miss Madge," he whispers hoarsely, "you do not mean that I am too late! You cannot mean that you are—"

"Sir Ralph, I am engaged already to another! and I have acted very, very wrongly indeed in not telling you so at once that night when you first spoke to me—when we were on the balcony. Oh! Sir Ralph, please forgive me, for I am very sorry!"

Again my face falls forward on my folded hands, again the tears course down my cheeks.

No answer comes from the man at my side. The seconds pass swiftly by, but nothing disturbs the silence save the deep sigh that wells up from the heart of my companion. His silence is more terrible to me than any reproachful words. I can bear it no longer; so, once again uplifting my head, I turn and confront the man whom I led to believe I—

"Oh, Sir Ralph! Do speak to me, please! Do tell me you will forgive me, and I have been so foolish!"

"And she has been so foolish!" I hear him murmur, as his eyes glance upwards at the pale stars just beginning to appear in the blue vault overhead.

"So very foolish," I repeat, "and I am so sorry!"

"And I am so sorry too, Miss Madge," he replies. "So very sorry, that I shall not care to stay another hour in the neighbourhood, but shall now take you home and then return to town."

The words are bitterly spoken, and a hard-set look crosses his face. I am thoroughly frightened at what I have done, and stand like a childen child with bent head.

"Come, Miss Arden," he continues, "it is getting late, and I am afraid your friends will miss you. Allow me to escort you back to your home."

His coldness and apparent indifference are too much for me!

For all reply I turn away from him, and begin quickly to retrace my steps down the narrow lane.

"Miss Arden! Miss Madge! I am in fault now! You have repeatedly asked my forgiveness for what you have done, and I have withheld it. Oh, Miss Madge! you can never know how deeply I feel this, but—I forgive you. We will part friends, and Heaven bless you, Miss Arden!"

And then he raises my hand to his lips; and I—I can say no more.

Passively I allow myself to be led down the lane, along the high road, and so on to the Vicarage gate.

"Good-bye, Miss Arden; and once again Heaven bless you!" Sir Ralph murmurs; and then I am standing just within the gates alone—while Sir Ralph goes from me for ever!

How wretched I feel, as I creep slowly along to the hall-door! My father is still absent, I find; so leaving a message for him with the servant I betake myself to my chamber. There I give vent to the torrent of tears with which my aching heart is burdened, and again and again blame myself for the part I have played as regards Sir Ralph Darrel.

Cousin Maude is here, and I am fast forgetting all my late trouble, while listening to her witty and laughable version of the end of the season in her dearly-beloved London town.

Dinner is over, and she and I are strolling up and down in the dewy orchard, in the cool of the evening. Only we two, for dear father is away busy with parochial duties, and Clifford—well, Clifford has not been such a constant visitor since the arrival of the fashionably dressed Lady Merton.

Of course I have confessed all to Cousin Maude—and she! At first she laughs most heartily at my rueful face, which I have put on, thinking it befits the occasion; and then, suddenly, her manner changes, and she speaks to me long and seriously of what a wrong part I had played throughout.

First—and this more especially, according to her lights—in contracting an engagement with a mere country practitioner! Of course a town physician would be quite another matter. Secondly—in allowing such a little affair to interfere with my chance of securing such an excellent party as Sir Ralph.

And now, this very evening, as we stroll along, arm-in-arm "neath the green apple-trees" Cousin Maude returns to the subject much to my dissatisfaction; for I fancy—and oh! I hope it may prove but fancy—that I am dwelling too much when alone on the late scenes, and recalling, with a sense of satisfied and delightful pride, the bevy of ardent admirers which have so lately clogged my steps at rout or crowded dance. Yes! And then Clifford seems altered—but that may be merely fancy on my part.

But to return.

We are fast approaching my favourite resting-place beneath the patriarch of the orchard, when Cousin Maude suddenly exclaims—

"I can't understand any girl who has a secret longing and hoping for town life, with all its delightful excitement, doing such a thing!"

As she speaks she lifts her trailing skirts from the dewy grass, and drawing her lace wrap close round her neck, glances down doubtfully at her dainty shoe.

I contemplate all these movements, then raises my own soft white draperies well above the heads of the golden buttercups, but answer not, only a little sigh will make itself heard as I reflect upon what is to follow. Cousin Maude pats my arm gently with her white jewelled fingers, and resumes—

"No, Madge, I really can't think how you could be so foolish as to allow the thought of that young—"

"Please say no more, Cousin Maude!" I plead.

"Don't interrupt me, Madge. I brought you out here purposely to let you know what I think of your behaviour with regard to Sir Ralph. Of course I had not the slightest idea but that he would follow you down here (though I believe the man fairly hates the country), and having received your father's consent would return to town an engaged man! And now to think that you are about to throw yourself away on a mere country doctor! It is preposterous! But I am determined it shall not be if I can help it!"

A look of triumph crosses Cousin Maude's face as she speaks—a look which I am better able to translate later on.

Then I summon up courage, and with bent head and averted eyes I ask, faintly and timidly—

"Cousin Maude, ought a girl to marry the man she loves, even though he be poor; or the man who can endow her with all that heart can desire, even though she does not know whether her feeling for him be of love's own kindling or no?"

I wait with hot and blushing face for her reply. It does not come for a few minutes, and when it does I fancy I detect a strange ring in her voice, a harsh and discordant sound as though the heart's true tones were being muffled and suppressed and falsified for the time being.

"Madge, you are like all other young girls of your age and bringing up," she replies. "You think the world is made for love, and you are still wrapped in youth's rosy-hued garments. Believe me, ere long, the garment will be exchanged for the more sober-hued cloak of reality; and then you will find how true my words are, how foolishly you are now acting."

"But, Cousin Maude," I argue, impatiently, "it cannot be wrong to love! You surely must have loved your husband!"

"Loved my husband! You poor silly little country-mouse to harbour still the theory which your seventeen summers still teaches you that all the couples you meet with were brought together by Cupid's shaft! Love and Lord Merton were indeed very far apart. No, no, Madge; I respected my late husband very much, and I grieved and mourned for him when he died, but my heart was never his. He knew it, poor man; but he was satisfied with the small amount of affection I still could bestow on him. Yes, love is all very well, but—"

"But, Cousin Maude, did you never love?" I ask, almost indignantly.

"Did I never love, Madge? Yes, long, long ago. When I was young I loved as passionately and fervently as you would tell me to-day that you love Clifford Ralston; but fate willed it otherwise. My love grew suspicious, then jealous, and so I hardened my heart, and when Lord Merton appeared on the scene I accepted him and his vast wealth, and I have never since regretted the step."

I glance up eagerly, for again I detect the false ring in my cousin's voice; and this time my eyes prove to me that words will often give the lie to the heart's truest feelings. For even as I look, the light in Cousin Maude's eye dims, while the lace on her bodice rises and falls, as though the heart beneath is strongly agitated.

"I wish I had never seen Sir Ralph Darrel!" I exclaim, passionately, more to myself, I believe.

"You foolish child!" exclaimed my companion.

"Why wish that?"

"Because everything seems to have gone wrong since—since he spoke to me on the balcony," I sob.

"Ah, I thought he had spoken, Madge, though you never made a confidante of me at the time, and I must say I felt rather vexed, but never said anything. And so he asked my little country cousin to go with him and reign as loved and petted wife amid the fine old rooms of Atherton Towers! And what did you answer, Madge?"

"Nothing then, Cousin Maude."

"Ah! then you have met since!" she questions, stopping and glancing searchingly into my face. We have reached the farthest end of the orchard, and are standing by the wooden paling which skirts the dusty high road.

Faint sounds of approaching footsteps, make themselves heard. I listen intently, for some-

thing within tells me that Clifford is near. I hesitate while my companion draws closer around her still the wraps, and leans her white and rounded arm on the wooden fence.

Nearer and nearer draw the footsteps, and now I can distinguish the form of my lover—Clifford Ralston. Still I reply not.

Cousin Maude grows impatient, and then, just as the approaching form is within earshot, she again questions in her clear, ringing voice,—

"Madge, tell me, dear. Am I not correct in supposing that you have met Sir Ralph since that night on the balcony?"

"Oh, Cousin Maude, I can't tell you now!" I exclaim in low tones; even as I speak Clifford is before us, hat in hand, and with his sweet but grave smile playing around his handsome mouth.

"Ah, Dr. Ralston, we are so much obliged to you for appearing just at this moment. Madge and I were just growing envious of each other's society, so that your arrival is most opportune."

"I am glad that it is so, Lady Merton," gravely replies my lover, glancing keenly at my blushing and disconcerted face meanwhile. I meet the gaze for an instant, then lower my eyes in confusion; for can he have overheard Cousin Maude's last speech? I fancy not, and yet why that look! And then a little wilful spirit hovers around me, and I toss my head slightly as I turn away and call to my companions as I go,—

"I am going down into the village to meet Papa. You will excuse me, Cousin Maude, now that you have another companion."

And then, before either can reply, I am running quickly, with uplifted skirt, through the dewy grass,—running very fast, but when I reach the little wicket-gate I do not turn my steps towards the village.

No! But on through the sweet-scented garden, and in at the open hall-door and up to my chamber.

Arrived there I turn the key in the lock, and then sinking into my favourite seat I cover my face with my hands and give vent to a flood of tears.

My thoughts fly backward, and again I see in fancy, Sir Ralph's sad face as he turned away from my father's gate that evening when I told him all.

And then I think of Clifford and what he would say did he know all. But this latter thought soon passes and gives place quickly to the former—Sir Ralph Darrel.

Unconsciously almost I whisper, over and over again, the name; and then I actually smile as I dwell in fancy upon the handsome form of the owner of that high-sounding name.

"And he has condescended to admire you," whispers a voice within.

And as I listen to the same a hot flush of gratified triumph mounts to my brow, and again I smile.

Then some of Cousin Maude's indignant speeches recur to me, but chief among them is one used that night when I told her first of my engagement to Clifford Ralston. I see her face distinctly, her fine lips curling slightly while she listens; then comes the scorn mixed with bitterness.

"And you might have been Lady Darrel!" Lady Darrel. How well it sounds to my maiden ears.

So I dream on and on of my handsome, aristocratic admirer, and see not the dark shadow looming in the distance.

Dangerous dreaming this for a young girl such as I; and a dreaming that is treason against my true and noble lover—poor country practitioner though he be.

But for the time I am intoxicated with a certain triumph, begot chiefly of my late visit to town, and so blinded I rush madly on to— But the story will tell itself.

At this point I recollect my duties as hostess; so, rising, I bathe my tear-stained, flushed face, and prepare to descend whither duty calls me. Downstairs in our pretty, flower-scented drawing-room, I find Cousin Maude at the piano playing dreamy bits from Chopin, while standing a little removed is Clifford, engaged in turning over

a portfolio of music which I have brought from town.

"All my new songs are there, Clifford!" I say, as I pass him by on my way to a low table at the other end of the room, whereon lies the fancy work with which I beguile the hours occasionally.

"Yes. I see my favourite is here! You must please sing it for me presently, Madge," he replies.

"Which is that?" I question.

Clifford holds up to my view the song he has selected. I glance carelessly up, but the hot blood will suffice my face as I read the title—"Never to Part."

Ah! How many times have I sung that same song with Sir Ralph standing by and leaning over, now and then, to turn the leaves.

But Clifford's eyes are upon me. So I thrust away all thoughts and recollections of that other, and make reply,—

"I admire your taste, Clifford, and I will do my best to render it as it should be sung."

Then I resume my fancy work.

Cousin Maude's fair jewelled fingers still wander over the ivory keys, and Clifford still turns leaf after leaf of my music, stopping now and then again to read the words.

And then, I know not what, but my heart beats quicker, and I feel impelled by a something within me to watch my lover's face as he studies the words of my new songs.

My hands fall idly to my lap, and I lean forward slightly until my breath comes faster and faster.

A smile irradiates Clifford's face as he reads the concluding words of the song he holds in his hand, then disappears, as with a slight sigh he places the piece with the pile he has already examined.

A pause ensues, while Cousin Maude's playing rises to a wall, then dies away in a pretty, soft air. Clifford seems listening intently to the latter, for his fingers are still and his eyes fixed on the title-page of the next song.

I bend still more forward and read distinctly the words in good bold print—"Oh! my Lost Love." And as I read them Sir Ralph's sad face again appears in misty outline before my mental vision.

The words of the song seem to come surging towards me, borne on my ear in his singing; his eyes seem to be bent upon my face in gentle, sad pleading, such as I had noted in the dim and gathering twilight that Sabbath evening when—

Crash! My straying thoughts were back again. Clifford is standing over all my scattered music, while Cousin Maude is looking on with flushed and slightly angered expression on her handsome face.

"What is it?" I ask, as I rise and approach the scene of confusion.

"I must beg your pardon, Lady Merton, for thus disturbing you, but I believe I was startled at a mere nothing. I will just collect these scattered songs, and then I must be returning homewards. Once again, Lady Merton, I apologise for thus startling you."

"It is of no consequence," Cousin Maude replies, with a haughty and formal bend of her dark head; then she resumes her playing.

But no dismal wall—no pretty, simple air proceeds from her jewelled fingers this time, but in their stead a brilliant march, whose triumphant tones seem reflected, in a measure, in the player's handsome face. The slim white fingers descended with a crash on the ivory keys, while the full lips assume a curled and triumphant expression. And all this time Clifford is on his knees, collecting one by one the pieces which he has let fall through his carelessness.

I watch in silence and wonder greatly at the change which has come over my lover's face. His lips are firmly shut and his brows knitted, as though he were suppressing some great feeling.

Perhaps Cousin Maude's haughty recognition of his apology has angered him, I reflect; while I still watch in silence till the last song lies again with the others in its place in the portfolio.

Then Clifford rises, places the latter in its former position, turning to Cousin Maude mutters

forth a few words of polite farewell, then with a faint bow in my direction he goes forth, closing the door after him—gone without the song he asked me to sing!

Lost in astonishment I rush quickly to the window from which a view of the road—his homeward route—can be observed, and strain my gaze eagerly in that direction.

In the uncertain twilight I note that my lover's head is bent low as he walks with noisy footsteps down the gravel-path, and so out into the high road. As the gate closes behind him Cousin Maude brings her triumphal march to an end, and then joins me at the window.

"What have you done, little Madge, to offend your good lover?" she asks, in light, mocking tones.

"I do not think Clifford is offended with me," I return; then add, prompted to it by the same wilful little spirit, "and I do not mind so very much if he be offended."

"You have just my spirit, little Madge!" Cousin Maude answers, "and I do not wonder at your not taking it to heart, considering your late triumphs, and securing such a prize as all the Belgravian girls are dying to obtain! Now that our dear and respected doctor has left us once again alone, come and sit down here by me, and tell me all about your last meeting with Sir Ralph."

"I cannot to-night, Cousin Maude; it is too late; and listen, there is the prayer-bell."

"Ah, I am sorry! I do hope your dear father will not dwell too long upon the miseries of Jeremiah. I am positively sleepy, though it is only ten o'clock," replies Cousin Maude.

Then, arm-in-arm, we repair to my father's study, where await us the rest of the household. That night, later on, I dream of Sir Ralph Darrel, and his name is on my lips when I awake in the broad July sunshine the following morning.

Three months later, and a bright sunshiny afternoon in October. Time, three o'clock. Clifford and I are walking briskly along the road in the direction of Ellerton Woods, for Clifford is on his way to visit one of the gamekeepers who has met with a rather dangerous gun-accident. And I am his companion; and, must I add, his unwilling companion! For since that July evening, during Cousin Maude's visit, when we were both so startled by Clifford's strange behaviour, a certain coolness has sprung up between my lover and myself. And yet not a word has been uttered by either that could in any way throw light or certify a reason of this coolness; but still it exists, almost imperceptible and indefinable at times; then again asserting and making its presence felt by long lapses of silence, and an absence of those endearing epithets and tender glances which lovers are apt and prone to indulge in when no third person is by.

Strange to say this increasing frigidity of manner on Clifford's part—this absence of loving acts does not vex me in the least. And yet, of course, generally speaking, I ought to feel slighted and be highly indignant at such unloverlike behaviour.

But no! And there is a reason for my not resenting Clifford's indifference. Shall I confess it?

During the long spells of silence, which so often occur, when he and I are strolling through the orchard, or sitting side by side on the gnarled branches of the "patriarch," my thoughts are far, far away, and the lover at my side has no part or lot in them. No! his place is supplied by another manly form!

Before me, day after day, arises the sad face of Sir Ralph Darrel; while again and again I start guiltily, and am time after time upon the point of confessing all to Clifford, when—

Well, something always intervenes, and so I keep my secret to myself and continue my day-dreams, in which my other admirer figures more conspicuously than does the one who is ever present.

And thus does the summer wane and pass away, and cool, bright-tinted autumn takes up

her sceptre and sheds her rainbow halo on all around.

And day by day I ask myself what I am to do should Clifford plead for a day to be fixed for our marriage, for I feel and know I dare not go to the altar with the one, while my heart is thus restlessly hovering betwixt the two!

For at times the old love returns in full force; and were it not for Clifford's coolness I persuade myself that all would be again as before that London visit of mine.

And then Cousin Maude writes so frequently, and in each letter some covert allusion is made to Sir Ralph, and in some way or the other she contrives to edge in a little hint respecting the contrast that exists between a country and a town life.

And still the days go by, and I grow more and more uncertain as to whether I acted rightly in telling Sir Ralph the truth, and thus banishing him from me for ever.

Had I waited a little while, perhaps I might have become—

Here I hesitate, and tell myself that I am a very wicked girl not to be satisfied with such a noble and true-hearted lover as Clifford Darrel has proved himself hitherto.

But to return.

Clifford and I have traversed half of the distance, and not a word has escaped either one, till we arrive at the entrance to Ellerton Woods. Clifford remarks, as he holds open the gate for me to pass in,—

"I hope we shall not fall in with any of the Colonel's guests."

I glance up quickly, and note the almost stern look on my lover's face.

"It will not much matter if we do," I reply, carelessly; then add, "especially as we are not acquainted with any of them."

"I heard your cousin, Lady Merton, mention the name of a gentleman who is, I believe, visiting at Ellerton Park at present."

"Ah, one of her London acquaintances, I dare say."

"Yes. The one I allude to is Sir Ralph Darrel. Did you meet him at all, Madge?"

I can't help the rush of crimson that will flood my face and neck as the name of the man who so fills my day-dreams falls from my lover's lips.

I stop hastily and stoop to pluck a few daisies, in order to conceal the agitation I cannot wholly restrain at mention of Sir Ralph's name.

The stalk of the floweret proves rather tough, and thus I gain a few seconds' respite before responding.

"Look! what a lovely shade of violet!" I exclaim, holding my prize up to Clifford's gaze.

"Very, indeed," he gravely replies; then adds, "but I think you met Sir Ralph Darrel during your visit to Lady Merton, Madge!"

"Sir Ralph Darrel! Oh, yes, he came once or twice! I believe I remember him slightly; "the last word tremblingly and confusedly spoken, though I had willed it otherwise, and my head will droop, though I would will to hold it erect as ever.

"Only slightly, Madge!"

"Why do you ask, Clifford?" I question, rather haughtily.

"Shall I tell you why, Madge? Yes. I think the time has now come, and I will tell you what I know. Madge, did you ever see this before to-day?" Clifford hurriedly asks, as he takes from his pocket a cabinet-sized photograph, and holds it up before my astonished gaze.

"Sir Ralph Darrel!" I exclaim, while a hot, burning flood of crimson again suffuses my face, as my eyes rest upon the well-remembered features, and then quickly vanishes, leaving me white and trembling. And all the time I feel instinctively that my companion's gaze is anxiously fastened on me, while still my eyes seem riveted to the likeness he holds before me.

"Yes, this is a photograph of Sir Ralph Darrel, Madge; but whether a true one or the reverse I can't possibly pass an opinion, as I have never yet had the honour of making his acquaintance."

"Where did you get it, Clifford?"

"Did you ever receive such a photograph from Lady Merton, or—I But I can't believe that

possible! and you must forgive my asking it, Madge. I was about to add, or from Sir Ralph himself!"

"Never, Clifford," I indignantly reply, though still I gaze wistfully at the well-remembered features. Well-remembered—for have they not been present in my day-dreams now for many a day past?

"Thank Heaven!" ejaculates Clifford, and there is a certain subdued gladness and relief in the accents of his voice that I glance up at him hastily, and add,—

"And I can't possibly imagine where you found this," touching it daintily with my gloved finger.

"That is my secret, Madge, and I do not think it would be wise to impart it to you, since you know nothing of it, evidently. No, I will destroy it at once, and then I shall feel easier and more satisfied. Oh, Madge! if you had confessed to its ownership I do not know what would have become of me! But now I feel such a relief, such a return to a happiness to which I have been a stranger for some time past. Now we will destroy this photo and throw the pieces to the autumn winds."

So saying, Clifford prepares to rend the likeness in two, when I suddenly lay my hands upon it and exclaim—

"Stay, Clifford! It may belong to Cousin Maude."

"I do not care in the least who may be the owner of it, provided it be not my own little Madge," replies Clifford, at the same time withdrawing the photo from my grasp; and encircling me with his arm he stoops and lays his lips on mine with all his old fondness and tenderness of manner.

"And now, Madge, for the demolition of another's property!"

I am powerless to stay the act; in a few moments the ground around us is strewn with little bits of card-board. I glance at one as it floats earthward with upturned face, and on it I note the features of the man whom I am learning to allow my thoughts to dwell upon so constantly.

Dare I stoop and pick it up!

I am two or three paces in the rear, and Clifford will never see! I am just in the act of stooping—the small and jagged piece of card-board is almost within my grasp—when my lover's voice sounds in my ears.

"That is right, Madge," he says, carelessly. "Pick it up and tear it in still smaller bits. Who knows but Sir Ralph Darrel may pass this way later on, and I would not that he should puzzle his brains, to the extent he doubtless would, as to who had thus ruthlessly destroyed such a flattering portrait of himself!"

The tears are not far off, as in my mortification, and not daring to refuse, I tear off first the well-shaped mouth, then the nose, and finally the eyes part company; for, in my anxiety to retain as long as possible the image of Sir Ralph, I take infinite pains to render the pieces as minute as possible. But the end comes, and the last tiny morsel flutters from my fingers and floats earthward, and finally rests on the yellow and sere frond of a bracken near by.

"Now for my patient in good earnest! We have dawdled sadly, Madge, and yet I do not regret the time wasted thus!" Clifford exclaims, as he takes my unresisting hand and lays it within his arm, and so onward in silence till the keeper's cottage appears in view.

"I will wait outside, Clifford! I do not care to sit indoors with old Granny Martin. She is so deaf that it is quite a labour to exchange even a few sentences."

"Very well, Madge, I shall not belong. Which way do you intend taking, in case I should not see you when I come out?"

There lie four grassy paths before me. I must choose one, and Fate is at my side.

"I will walk down here," I reply, advancing towards the one nearest to us.

"Good-bye for the present, then, Madge; I shall not be long."

And now I am free for a short time, and the first use I make of my freedom is to draw forth my handkerchief and wipe away the tears,

which, though restricted in my lover's presence, now trickle quickly down my cheeks. And then my thoughts revert to the subject which is causing my grief.

"I can't possibly imagine where Clifford found it," I murmur, ever so softly, for I am fearful lest any of Colonel Ellerton's guests should be near. "Cousin Maude must have brought it with her, and left it lying about; but then why should Clifford have stolen it from her, and what induced him to take such an interest in a man of whom he knows nothing? Unless—"

And then I stop, and noting a fallen trunk at the side of the grassy path I approach it, and seat myself thereon; then I resume my musings.

My last word "unless" has recalled to me the evening when Cousin Maude and I strolled in the orchard, and Clifford joined us from the road; and all too distinctly I remember, like a flash, the import of her speech previous to Clifford joining us.

Yes; it has been as I feared, and Clifford must have overheard Cousin Maude's words.

So absorbed do I become in my retrospections and recollections that I fairly start from my seat on the fallen trunk with a slight scream as a black-and-tan terrier breaks from the brushwood at my side, and greets me with loud and noisy barking.

"Down, Vixen, down!" exclaims a voice at the same moment from behind me; then adds, "Allow me to apologise for my dog thus startling you."

Hurriedly I turn, and there, hat in hand, and bowing courteously, is Sir Ralph Darrel.

"Miss Arden! This is, indeed, an unexpected pleasure!" the latter exclaims, holding forth his hand meanwhile.

With hot and blushing face I put forth mine also, and allow it to rest unresistingly in the firm grasp with which it is imprisoned.

"I did not expect to meet you, Sir Ralph!" I stammered forth, after a few seconds of inexpressible confusion, during which Sir Ralph has continued to retain my fingers within his.

"Nor I you, Miss Arden, though I hoped that Fate would be kind to me, and, you see, she has not disappointed me. But my dog has disturbed you, Miss Arden; allow me to lead you to your seat."

And with the same stately grace and courtesy as though he was in a crowded drawing-room, Sir Ralph places my hand within his arm, and leads me to the fallen trunk.

Then seating himself in careless attitude he whistles to his dog, who is roaming restlessly in and out of the brushwood, while I remain still in a semi-state of delighted confusion.

I had so often dreamed of a meeting since that fair Sabbath evening when my own lips had given Sir Ralph his *coug*, and now it has come—this longed-for meeting. And I feel powerless to say or do anything.

"The time has seemed long to me since—since we parted, Miss Arden. Has it been the same to you? But, no! That is a foolish question of mine, for, of course, there are so many things a woman can take pleasure in, and they serve admirably to pass away the time; while for us men, we have nothing to fall back upon but our pipes, and then often amid their smoke our thoughts revert to pleasanter and happier times, and we in fancy go over the 'might-have-been.' Ah! believe me, Miss Arden, there is nothing sadder on this earth than the terrible 'might-have-been!'"

And so Sir Ralph talks on, and ever and anon his eyes are turned full upon me, and I return their glances in a shy and confused way.

Once I read in them a look of such—well, a look that causes me to lower my gaze; and which covers my face with blushes. While still his low, soft voice sounds in my ear, filling me with pleasure and yet with pain at the same moment.

My delight at this meeting knows no bounds; but it is followed so closely by the recollection that Clifford may appear at any moment that I scarcely know which predominates—the pleasure or the pain.

"You are not wandering here alone, Miss

Arden! If so, you will allow me the pleasure of escorting you back to the Rectory!"

"I am waiting here for—for some one, Sir Ralph," I stammer; "and I must be going now, or we may miss one another."

I rise as I speak, and with a quick and hurried bow am turning away, when a hand is laid unceremoniously on my shoulder, and a voice—oh, how it thrills me!—sounds close in my ear.

"Going so soon, Miss Arden, and without any other farewell than a formal bend! And I have so longed, so hoped for another meeting, and now it is ended thus!"

"I did not mean to be stiff and formal, Sir Ralph; but I must go. Here is Clifford."

"Good-bye, then, Miss Arden! We shall meet again, Madge."

He raises his hat courteously and turns away, while I walk forward to meet my lover. A dark shade rests on Clifford's brow; but his tone is cheery enough as he greets me.

"I have not kept you waiting long, Madge! And I hope I did not interrupt Sir Ralph Darrel's conversation. Was he inquiring for his photograph, or were you giving him a detailed account of its recent demolition?"

"I have only spoken a very few words to Sir Ralph, Clifford; none but what anyone might have been a listener to," I reply, somewhat loftily.

"I do not doubt you, Madge, dear. But, thank Heaven, I was not far off," he mutters, rather to himself than to me.

Again the set lips and knitted brows. I feel very much annoyed. What possible harm can there be in my thus conversing with one whom I have so often met in my Cousin Maude's presence!

"Madge, do you believe in dreams?"

The question comes from Clifford. I am spending the afternoon at his home. Mrs. Ralston, always more or less an invalid, has just left us and gone indoors to her sofa by the low French window, from which, as she laughingly tells us, she can still view our dear forms.

"Madge, do you believe in dreams?"

We are standing together on the small, smooth lawn facing the parlour window, through which I catch a glimpse of Mrs. Ralston's white cap, when my lover puts his question.

"Do I believe in dreams! What a strange question, Clifford. No, of course I do not; at least, I hope I am not so silly," I reply, rather scornfully, as I turn and walk away towards a small arbour, almost hidden from view by the glossy laurels growing around it.

My lover follows me and seats himself by my side.

"Madge, dear, I have a reason for asking you. I used not to believe in the supernatural, but I have had good cause lately to think with Byron that 'They speak like sybils of the future!'"

"Clifford, how strangely you talk. But I remember now you spoke of a dream that seemed to haunt you on the night of my return home from Cousin Maude's. I asked you then to relate it to me, but you would not!" I exclaim, rather pettishly.

"I recollect it all, Madge, dear! I did not satisfy your curiosity then, as I did not deem it necessary; but now, perhaps, it is better that you should know that, and also our secret."

"Whose secret, Clifford?"

"My mother's and mine, darling. Listen. Lay your hand in mine and hear me patiently. You are not cold, dear!"

"No; oh no, Clifford. Tell me thy dream—and the secret!" I answer quickly, at the same time obeying Clifford's request, and placing my hand within his.

Silence for a few seconds, while my lover looks up at the October sky overhead, and I watch the expression of his face. Still with upturned face he speaks again:

"Madge, I will begin with the secret. Four years ago this very month I had a sister living."

"A sister, Clifford?" I interrupt, quickly.

"Yes, dear. A little sister as pretty and charming as yourself. And I worshipped her almost, and so did my mother. She was the light of our small home after my father died,

and we both thought so much of her. Dear little Kitty! And then one fair summer's morn there came to our small village a wandering artist—a man of about forty, with fine figure, and large dark eyes, and grave, yet fascinating manner.

"A week passed by and rumours reached our small household of the beautiful bits of scenery dashed off in free and careless style by this stranger-artist. And Kitty, my own dear little sister, laughingly said that she must see the paintings. She was fond of her brush, and had some taste, though at present uncultivated.

"Day by day she wished more and more for a sight of the stranger's canvas; and at length she had her wish gratified.

"Ah! how well I remember that bright May evening, when, sitting alone with my mother in our pretty sitting-room, the door suddenly flew open and Kitty entered with sparkling eyes and flushed cheeks, and then her tale was told; and harmless enough it seemed to us that bright May evening, and merrily enough we joined in Kitty's clear, happy laughter, as she told in her pretty way all the incidents connected with her casual meeting with the stranger-artist, and her view of his wonderful sketches.

"Ay! we could neither of us foretell the future, nor divine for an instant that the day would come when the thought and remembrance of that evening, which was fraught with so much merriment to us then, would be as gall and bitterness to our hearts hereafter!

"The weeks flew by, and the artist was no longer a stranger to us, but a frequent guest at our table. And Kitty—our dear, innocent Kitty—well! it was easily seen from the beginning what a charm his presence had for her. All the love of her sweet maiden heart was showered upon Ralph Gordon!"

(I started visibly at mere mention of the familiar name—Christian.)

"You are cold, Madge, dear! I can finish another time."

"Go on, please. It was only a—spider that made me start so."

Clifford draws still closer to me, then continues—

"Yes, my own dear sister loved Ralph Gordon with all her heart; and shamefully he returned her maiden confidence!"

Clifford pauses, while an angry look passes over his countenance.

"Villain!" he mutters beneath his breath, whilst his right hand is raised and clenched, as though against some hidden foe.

"Clifford! Don't look so!" I murmur, leaning my head against his shoulder, while the tears will trickle down my cheeks.

At my words—at my action—Clifford starts. Then, glancing down at my tear-stained cheeks, murmurs tenderly—

"My own little Madge! Did I frighten you, dear! I will not finish my—"

"Oh, please go on, Clifford!" I plead. "Your little sister—what happened next?"

"Poor little Kitty! She gave her wealth of love, and received in return—a broken heart! They were married, and this Ralph Gordon took her away to some quiet seaside lodgings—only for a time, he assured my mother. But he feared to declare his marriage to his friends just then, as he did not wish to offend an old uncle who was very rich, and whose estates he hoped, and had every reason to expect, he should inherit should he continue to please him till the time of his death. And so in tears and sorrow we let our Kitty go away with her artist-husband. And for a time all seemed well with her. Her weekly budget of domestic news was bright and cheerful in its tone.

"Then came a change. But I will not harrow your feelings by relating minutely all that happened to our dear little Kitty. The months passed by; and then, just as she was looking forward to holding in her arms her first-born child the end came.

"My mother was hastily summoned, and three weeks later all was over; and our bright and pretty Kitty lay beneath the sod in the small churchyard just within the sound of the restless waves she had learned to love in her lonely wife-

hood; for I learnt it all from my mother later on to whom Kitty had confessed all a few hours before her end came.

"Her husband had soon got tired of her pretty face and artless ways, and, with some excuse or the other, had gone his way for weeks at a time, and left her to bear, as well as she might, the rôle of neglected wife! Where he went, she was ignorant—or pretended to be—though mother always thinks she had the clue, but would not reveal it to her husband's dishonour. Poor loving and true little Kitty! Oh, Madge! you can never know how we have mourned her, but we keep her wedding, her marriage, and her death a secret now, for it all seems so sacred to us that we naturally shrink from letting strangers into our confidence. But you—you will soon be one of us, darling; therefore I have told you this—my mother wished it also. And then, again, another reason is, Madge, I believe that you have met this man, and I dread his fascinating ways! I have been warned in a dream!"

Clifford speaks hurriedly and excitedly; then stops suddenly and glances round him, as though fearful of listeners. While I—a fearful idea has flashed through my brain! Can Sir Ralph Darrel and the husband of Clifford's sister be the same! And then again, what can possibly have suggested the idea to me? I cannot say; but I feel so sure that I am correct in my surmise that I do not hasten Clifford for any further explanation and enlightenment upon the subject.

Five minutes or thereabouts pass by in silence, then Clifford speaks again.

"Now for my dream, Madge. I dreamed that you and I were together in some fair, flowery meadow, through which flowed a wide and silvery stream; we stood together, hand in hand, and watched it as it flowed gently onward. Suddenly another figure came into view, and took up its position exactly facing us, but on the other bank of the stream. It stood there silently and motionless; then suddenly raised its left hand and beckoned to you. You smiled in return, and slipped your hand quickly from my grasp, then took a step or two forward, as though you would leave me for that other; but, even as your feet trod the brink of the stream, a chasm opened and you disappeared! At the same instant a loud laugh of mockery and derision issued from the lips of the figure on the opposite bank, while I fell senseless to the earth. That is my dream, Madge. Not very dreadful in the telling, you will say; but I yet feel thankful that it was only a dream!"

"But the figure, Clifford, that beckoned to me—did you know it, or recognize it?"

"I did, Madge; and therein lies all my terror!"

All my bygone day-dream, in which Sir Ralph Darrel's face and form had figured so constantly and so conspicuously, recur suddenly to me; and faint with suppressed agitation, I falter forth, "Who was it, Clifford?"

"It was the face and form of the man who ruined my sister's happiness! It was the face and form of him whose likeness we destroyed together in Ellerton Woods, Madge!"

"But, Clifford: that was the photograph of Sir Ralph Darrel!" I exclaim.

"Sir Ralph Darrel now, Madge. His hopes have been realised, and he has succeeded to the title and estates he so coveted. But Sir Ralph Darrel or plain Ralph Gordon, the man is the same for all that. And you have met him, Madge!—have been thrown in his way in crowded ball-room, and have stood with him in the moonlit balcony, and, thank Heaven, have come back to me unscathed!"

Oh! the rush of shame that dyes my soul then as my lover speaks! Unscathed! I, who have, day by day, been treacherously devoting the hours to dreaming of another than my lawful lover!

The twilight is gathering fast now, and I comfort myself that my face is too much in the shade for Clifford to read all the agitation thereon; but speak I must.

"Clifford! The photograph—where did you find it?"

"Where I found one of the same once long before, when he came as Kitty's lover, Madge."

"Where was that?" I stammer forth.

"Enclosed within the leaves of a song that my sister was accustomed to sing to us all in the twilight evenings," Clifford replies, sadly.

"Ah, I remember now! But he did not put it there, I feel certain, for I sorted all my music only—"

"Never mind, dear, who put it there," answers Clifford. "I am quite satisfied that it did not find its way there through the agency of these little fingers," says my lover, bending low his head, and laying his lips on my ungloved hand.

Again the rush of shame to my heart, as I listen to my dear, generous, unsuspecting lover! Shame! Ah! I know so well how much I have to be ashamed of as memory bears it all back to me. I feel wretched and miserable enough at this moment.

"Clifford, I am cold."

"We will go indoors to the mother, dear."

The last scene rises before me.

"Madge, I have just come from Ellerton Park. Mrs. Bonce's granddaughter is staying with her. She is as delicate as ever, and has been obliged to remain in her bed the last few days. Poor thing, I fear she is very ill!"

"I am so sorry, Father."

"Yes; I knew you would feel it, Madge. You used to take such an interest in her when she was in the school."

"She was such a pretty, clever little thing, Father! I think I will go up and see her this afternoon."

"Well, my dear, I was going to give you Mrs. Bonce's message, which is to the effect that she would take it as a very great favour if Miss Madge would come and see her Ellen. And you will go, Madge!"

"Yes, Father. I am expecting Clifford, but he will not mind when he knows where I am. And, happy thought, he can come for me! These November days are so short that it will be quite dark before I set out to return."

"Yes; Clifford can come and fetch you, Madge. I am glad you will go to-day, for I fear poor Ellen's hours are numbered," my father replies.

"Oh, Father, so ill as that!" I exclaim.

"I fear so, Madge."

Later on in the day, about half-past three o'clock, I find myself sitting by the bed-side of poor Ellen Bonce.

A faint, sweet smile irradiates her once pretty face, as I read from the Book.

"One chapter more," she murmurs, as I sit length close the leaves and glance up towards her. "Just one more please, Miss Madge!" she pleads.

I cannot refuse her, so turn again to the place where I have been reading, and commence.

The time slips quickly by. Already it is getting dusk, and I think of my homeward walk.

I bring my reading to a close and take my farewell of the dying girl.

"Do not trouble to come down with me, Mrs. Bonce; I can find my way out, and I want to go into the library for a book of poems which the Colonel said I might have to read. Do not let me take you away from Ellen; I can find my way easily."

Mrs. Bonce yields at length, and I descend the grand old staircase, and make my way to the library. Silence reigns throughout the house.

Colonel Ellerton and family are abroad for the winter, and there is but one servant at present under Mrs. Bonce.

In the library it is darker still. Some of the shutters are still barred.

I cross the room, and make my way to the window, which exactly faces the shelves where I know I shall find the poet I seek. I unfasten the heavy shutters, and fold them back, then look out. A woman's face is pressed close against the pane, and her eyes are peering eagerly, though cautiously, into the room.

With a slight exclamation I turn away, and cross to the bookshelves.

"Who is the woman?" I wonder. "Some friend of the servants, I suppose."

Concluding thus, I continue my search uncon-

earnedly. The volume is found at length, and in my eagerness I open it and glance down at the lines.

"How beautiful!" I murmur softly, as I turn another page and read on.

So absorbed do I become in the poet's thrilling language that I am deaf and blind for the time being, to all around me, and start aside with a slight scream, as a voice sounds in my ear, and close to me.

"We have met again then, Madge! I prophesied to you in the woods that day we should, and I am a true prophet."

"Sir Ralph Darrel!" I gasp.

"Yes, Madge. And you are glad to see me!" As he speaks he bends forward, and takes my hand in his.

I really am too astonished—too frightened—to offer any resistance, for he seems so changed. The same fine figure, the same handsome face and dark eyes; but the expression in the latter. Ah, I shudder as I glance up and note it all! Like a flash, too, comes the recollection of his dead wife.

Again he speaks,—

"Madge, I have sought long how I might bring about this meeting, and now Fate has laid it at my feet. Madge, now I can tell you what I have suffered since last we parted, and now I can hear from your lips that you will no longer look coldly on me, or set aside my love!"

As he utters the last words a low hissing sound makes itself distinctly heard from the direction of the window against which I had seen the woman's face pressed.

"Sir Ralph, you forget that—that I am already promised to—"

"Ah, yes. To the respected doctor of this small village, Madge. No, I do not forget anything; only that it is swallowed up in the other thought that has taken complete possession of me. I mean the thought of the great love which I have for you. Madge, think before you reject my love of the advantages which it can bring you! Think of all this, weigh it well in your mind with that other love offered to you, and choose mine. Your happiness will be my first and last thought. Madge, Madge, I love you! Do not reject my love!"

Again the hissing sound, but this time far more distinct. It reaches my companion's ear, too, for he starts and glances round with knitted brow and stern eye.

"What is it?" I almost shriek, for the whole scene is overwhelming me fast.

"Nothing, Madge, that need thus alarm you. I will just go out and prove to you that there is no one outside. You wait here for me."

Sir Ralph releases my hands, and turns away. I sink into a chair near by, and burying my head and face in my hands sob aloud.

"Oh, Clifford, where are you?" I cry in my sorrow. And then, even as I utter his name, I hear his voice in the hall. I rise, and rush to the door, and look out only just in time to see his figure disappear round a corner, in company with—

And here a fit of trembling seizes me, and I am compelled again to seek shelter in the library; for the terrible dread has entered into my very soul, and I wait with loud beating heart my lover's return.

For Clifford is in company with that other—and harm may befall him.

And then I recollect the expression in Sir Ralph's eyes as he had bent them on me a few minutes previously—such a look of passionate and intense feeling, as though the man could be, and would be, capable of anything or everything.

Still the moments creep slowly by, and still I am alone in the darkening library, with naught for company but the shadow of the dread thought that flashed across my brain as I saw Clifford's form disappear.

And then all my past rises before me, and I see how wrongly I have acted throughout; recognise the fact that I am to blame for Sir Ralph's presence here this afternoon, for I ought to have confessed my engagement to him long ago.

But it is too late to recall the past. I must

bear the consequences of my foolish pride and wrong-doing.

Another ten minutes passes thus, and then Clifford enters the room. I spring towards him with a little glad cry of relief and joy as he draws me very close to his heart, and murmurs,—

"She is still my little Madge! Though the serpent has been near her again still she is free from his trail, thank Heaven!"

"Oh, Clifford, where is Sir Ralph?" I ask.

My lover puts me from him quickly, and in the dusky twilight searches my face eagerly with deep and questioning gaze.

"The trail is not there," he murmurs to himself, as he again draws me closer.

I dare not again repeat my question.

"Now, dear, I will go and fetch my hat. I think I left it in Mrs. Bone's sitting-room. You will not mind waiting here a moment, dear!"

"I will wait, Clifford, only please do not be long. I do not like this dark room."

"Silly child!" laughs my lover, as he turns away in search of his hat.

Five minutes elapse; then he returns, but hatless.

"Madge, I believe I must go home without it, for I really cannot remember where I left it, and I do not like to disturb Mrs. Bone's. It is very mild out, and I shall not take cold."

He offers me his arm at the same time, and then we turn to leave the library.

"You will not mind coming out the back way, Madge," Clifford says, presently. It will shorten our walk, and it is already late. Your father will be expecting you, dear."

I am too worn out to make any demur at this arrangement; but I feel I can only submit to anything that Clifford may propose. So in silence we set out from Ellerton Park, and bend our steps homeward.

Arrived there, I take a candle from the hall, and repair at once to my own room, where I sink down into my own favourite chair, and go over the events of the past hour.

As I reflect on the late scene my eyes wander up and down my dress and jacket. My dress is one of which I have taken great care hitherto, and is such a good fit, and our village is not noted for good dressmakers; but now as my gaze wanders up and down the skirt, I fancy I detect some dark spots where no such spots should be.

Not being able to satisfy myself upon this point I rise and draw nearer to the light. Yes, there, too surely, are several large spots! Oh horror! they are red as blood!

Then, like a flash of lightning it all dawns upon me, only I cannot yet shape my dreadful thoughts into words.

No! I must act—and at once.

Hurriedly blowing out my candle I open my door, and descend carefully and cautiously, and so on to the hall door.

Then with winged feet I fly along the road in the direction of Ellerton Park, in at the park gates, up the winding drive, till I gain the library windows; then on till the white stone steps of the front entrance come into view in the half-light.

I slacken my speed now, for am I not nearing—What! Gracious Heaven!

There it is! My fearful idea is then realised, and I fall senseless over the lifeless body of Sir Ralph Darrel.

"Madge, are you strong enough to read this?"

It is a week later, and I am lying on the sofa in our pretty drawing-room, where I have been borne in my father's arms for the first time since that dreadful night.

"Yes, Father; quite," I reply, as I glance up and note that it is addressed to me in Clifford Ralston's handwriting.

"I will join you again presently, Madge," father says, as, having placed the letter on the table at my side, he goes out, shutting the door behind him.

I lie and gaze at the superscription for a few minutes, then slowly lift one hand and take it up.

(Continued on page 65.)

MY SWEETHEART.

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CHAPTER XLIX.

IN such a moment of intense excitement no human being can be responsible for what ensues.

With a cry she attempted to wrench herself free from that cruel, maddening grasp.

It may have been that in that desperate struggle the point of the long, silver pin Paula held in her hand turned accidentally against him, but the next moment the beautiful diamond pin was buried deep in his heart.

With a deep groan he staggered backward, his hands relaxing their hold, and that deep groan was echoed in a cry of horror from the door-way.

Paula turned her face in that direction, and saw Mildred standing on the threshold as white as death, her hands clasped in terror.

"I did not mean to do it!" moaned Paula, looking with stunned, horrified eyes at Dudley as he lay white and motionless at her feet. "Oh, Mildred, he goaded me to it! Save me! save me!" and she shrank back with a pitiful cry from the glassy eyes staring up into her own.

Mildred came hurriedly forward, knelt down beside the prostrate figure, placing her hand quickly over his heart.

"There is life yet!" she cried, joyfully; and in an instant she had torn off his coat and vest, and had caught up a towel, and with steady, deft hands bound it over the wound, stopping the flow of blood. "He is not dead, Paula," she repeated. "Thank Heaven, you are spared the stain of a crime upon your soul! We will soon bring him to, and—"

The sentence was never finished. There was a quick step in the corridor followed an instant later by an impatient tap at the door.

"Oh, Mildred! save me, for Heaven's sake! Here is Gregor!" and Mildred felt Paula's hot hands clinging to her, and the cry that fell from her lips was like nothing human.

"What shall I do?" she cried, in a frantic whisper.

Mildred rose to the occasion.

"Hush!" she whispered, quickly. "Trust to me."

With an almost superhuman effort Mildred stooped, caught Dudley with a firm hold, and literally dragged him by main force to an adjacent curtained alcove and thrust him into it, letting the velvet portières fall quickly about him, shutting him from view.

"Now you are safe, my darling," she panted; "you can open the door."

Paula hastened at once to do her bidding. She threw the door open wide.

Yes, there stood Gregor, looking oh, so handsome! with the love-light shining on his face.

"My darling," he cried, stepping lightly into the room, "I can brook the delay no longer. Why have you kept me waiting so long? I am so anxious to claim you as my dear little bride, and—"

The words stuck in his throat.

He grew pale as death; his eyes were riveted on a fashionable coat and vest and silk hat lying in a heap at the side of the room, which, alas! Mildred, in her great excitement, had forgotten to remove.

"Will you tell me what they are doing here?" he asked, pointing to them.

Her eyes followed his, and she saw—oh! bitter, black shame and horror!—she saw the gulf yawning beneath her feet—she saw the ruin before her.

Paula shrank back, trembling as though he had struck her a blow. She knelt at his feet and tried to speak, but no words came from the white, anguished lips.

Dear Heaven! the trembling hands were clinging to him, the weeping eyes were raised to his in woful supplication.

He could have cried aloud in his anguish at the horrible suspicion shaped itself in his mind.

Where was the owner of that coat and hat? What were they doing in Paula's boudoir? Where was the man to whom they belonged? And the odour of cigar-smoke made him fairly reel with awful fear.

"Tell me what this means!" said Gregor Thorpe, exerting a great control over himself.

"Not yet—oh, not yet!"

He gazed upon her now in amazement and alarm.

Had she gone suddenly mad?

"Speak to me, Paula," he said. "Of all people in the world, you need fear me least, because I love you best."

She caught his hand in hers and laid her face against it.

"Look at me, Gregor," she cried, piteously. "But oh! promise me that you will not love me less when I tell you all."

She must have caught sight of his face then, for her voice died away in a wail of deep despair.

"You must forgive me, Gregor, when I tell you all," she persisted—"you must, or I shall die here at your feet. Great Heaven! there is no pity in your face, no love in your eyes. Your heart is growing hard and cold towards me. Let me die—let me die!"

"Where is he?" broke in Gregor, sternly, and with a dark frown on his face. "I will search for him in this house until I find him, and when I do, it will be war to the knife between us. It will be his life or mine!"

He stood there before her, the incarnation of the fiercest and intensest passion she had ever seen or imagined.

Suddenly the velvet portières parted, and a pale, lovely figure glided forth, coming swiftly to Paula's side.

She raised the weeping girl in her arms, pillowed her head on her bosom, and clasped the shivering form close in her strong, tender embrace.

"You here again, Mildred Garstin!" he cried, recoiling from her in amazement.

She turned her beautiful, noble face to him, and answered, slowly:

"I, and I alone, can answer your words as to what that coat and hat are doing here; believe that it is my affair, not Paula's."

For an instant there was silence intense, painful.

"Then is it your lover concealed here?" he asked, in an amazed tone, as though he could hardly credit the evidence of his amazed senses.

The girl raised her head proudly.

"I am not aware that I am entitled to render an account of my actions to you, Mr. Thorpe," she said.

"Certainly not, if they have no reference to Paula, my affianced bride," he returned, calmly; "but if you are what your own words convict you of being, your very touch pollutes the girl whom you dare clasp in your arms. Unhand her! She must join me in sending you from under this roof within the hour. I shall take it upon myself to fling your lover bodily into the street!"

He made a move as if he were about to search for him; but Mildred flung herself before him.

"Do not take another step!" she said, hoarsely. "I promise you I will leave this house at once."

Paula clung to her hysterically; but she put the hot clinging hands from her with gentle firmness.

"Paula," cried Gregor Thorpe, his voice shaking with emotion, "if, even in my thoughts, I have done you wrong, I shall never forgive myself. You will pardon me, dear!"

She turned away from him with a dry, hard sob, and still clung piningly to Mildred.

"I will give you ten minutes to compose yourself," he said; "you will join me then down in the drawing-room, where the clergyman awaits us."

"Yes," she said, thankful—oh, so thankful—for the respite.

He turned and quitted the room, and for the moment the dread ordeal was over.

As the door closed after him, Paula fell back, half fainting, in Mildred's arms.

"Do not weep so bitterly. You are saved! No one will ever know what has happened. With me your secret is safe as the grave."

Mildred spoke rapidly, and no one noticed how her brave voice quavered. Yet, Paula was saved; but at what a fearful cost—a cost that had

stricken her name from the roll of honourable women in the estimation of the one man whose good opinion was as dear as life to her.

Oh, surely it was cruel, cruel!

She had been so good, so self-sacrificing all her life; but it seemed to bring her nothing but woe.

Some women are born for sunshine, happiness, and love, and others are destined to walk in coldness, darkness, and desolation. Mildred realised it but too well at this pitiful moment.

The strain had been too much for Paula. With a little gasp she sank down in a white heap at Mildred's feet.

It was terrible for Mildred to witness her pitiful unconsciousness of her own position—more terrible still to be obliged to arouse her from it.

Her valiant efforts were rewarded a moment later by seeing her blue eyes open slowly.

"Was it all a dream—a horrible dream, Mildred!" she cried.

"Paula, it is no dream: You are a brave and strong spirit; you can meet this sudden calamity without sinking under it. You must arouse yourself and go down to the drawing-room, where your affianced husband awaits you to make you his bride."

"But Pierce, Mildred—what have you done with him? I thought I heard voices here a moment since. Even the coat and hat are not here!"

"I have had him taken away. I rang for the butler, and said to him: 'Here is a stranger who seems to have mistaken our house for his own, or wandered in here by chance. Remove him quietly by some rear-door, that he may not disturb the wedding festivities. It seems to be a common occurrence.' He did not marvel at it, but quietly lifted the slender, athletic figure of Dudley in his herculean arms, together with the coat and hat, and bore him quickly from the room. On the threshold he paused."

"Oh, miss!" he cried, "I am afraid we are in the meshes of some deep mystery. The man has been foully dealt with. Come and see this wound upon him."

"I noticed it the moment I entered the room and saw him here," I returned, calmly.

"I shall summon the police and have him taken care of."

"No, no; not that!" I cried. Let him be taken to a private hospital at Miss Barton's expense."

"He bore him away; and, oh! how my heart beat lest he would meet anyone in the corridor."

"But he did not?" whispered Paula, fearfully.

"No," was the reply.

"What is to become of me now!" sobbed Paula. "Something worse will follow."

"You must marry Gregor at once, and carry out your original plan of going far away with him. Time is speeding. You know how anxiously and impatiently your bridegroom awaits you. Be brave, my darling, for that is your only hope of safety."

CHAPTER L.

As Mildred uttered those words she commenced tying on her bonnet.

"Where are you going?" gasped Paula.

"I must leave the house," returned her sister, in a voice broken with suppressed sobs. "It would not do for him to find me here. He would turn me from his door, and that would kill me."

"Yes; but you are innocent!" burst forth Paula, in an accession of agony.

"It is the innocent who suffer most," retorted Mildred, with a sad, sweet smile, her dark eyes filled with unutterable pain.

"But you must not go. I will not have it so."

Mildred put the clinging arms from her.

"I must go until this blows over," she declared, firmly but gently.

At that moment, Miss Dawes, followed by Babetta, entered the room, and changed the course of three lives by that one action.

So strange is fate—most uncontrollable!

"Not ready yet, Miss Barton!" she cried,

gaily. "Why, you are positively no nearer ready than when I left you nearly half an hour ago; and you never saw such an impatient fellow as that handsome lover of yours. Ah! Miss Garstin, how shall we ever believe in Miss Barton's promises again!"

Then she noticed how pale they both were, and she felt intuitively there was something terribly wrong.

"You will come down and witness the ceremony," whispered Paula, faintly, in Mildred's ear. But the girl drew back with a low moan.

What! see the man who had once been her own lover wedded to another, even though that other was Paula! No, no! she loved him too fondly for that.

Paula turned slowly and followed Miss Dawes from the room, quite believing when Mildred bowed her head it had been a token of assent.

Gregor came forward with a glad smile, taking both her hands in his.

"You are here at last, my darling!" he cried, tenderly.

What happened after that seemed almost a dream to the girl. She remembered that the clergyman came forward, but what he said was a confused memory to her.

She looked around for Mildred among the faces that seemed whirling past her, but she did not see her.

They took their places before the clergyman, and the solemn words were begun which were to make her Gregor Thorpe's bride. As in a dazed dream she heard Gregor's responses, then the minister turned to her.

She heard the words addressed to her as though they sounded from afar off.

She tried to speak, but no words came from her white lips.

"Answer him, my darling," whispered Gregor; "speak up bravely. This is no ordeal—simply a ceremony that gives you a husband who fairly adores you."

She tried to answer, but as the words were half formed on her lips there was a sharp report, and a bullet, swift as a lightning flash, struck the girl, making a deep wound on her temple in its mad flight, and, glancing off, buried itself in the opposite wall.

Instantly there was the wildest confusion.

In a flash, Gregor Thorpe had sprung to the window to catch the assassin.

Down the path he saw a tall, dark figure moving rapidly away.

In an instant he had reached its side.

It was a woman. He grasped her arm, and with one wrench he tore the veil from her face.

For one awful moment they stood looking into each other's eyes.

Gregor Thorpe's face was ghastly white. An unknown, untold horror lay in his eyes; his lips trembled with uncontrollable emotion.

It was Mildred, pale, terrified, wondering. She gazed at him like one fascinated, making no attempt to escape from the heavy grasp upon her arm.

"What is it!" she gasped.

"You guilty woman!" cried Gregor—"you cruel, guilty, jealous woman!"

She shrank back as though he had struck her.

"You cruel, guilty, jealous woman!" repeated Gregor. "Own the truth! You may thank Heaven that your cruel design was frustrated by Providence! You have not succeeded—your plan miscarried. I once thought you a noble woman; but I find you the cruellest, wickedest of your sex. I wonder that Heaven permits such wicked women as you to live!"

She stood quietly before him, the same dazed look on her face.

"I do not understand, you say such hard—such cruel things," she moaned.

"Hard and cruel!" he repeated with bitter scorn.

"I did all for the best," she murmured, more to herself than to him.

There was such infinite sadness in the sweet voice, such deep despair in the young face, that Gregor Thorpe was touched despite his bitter rage.

"Tell me what made you do this—this cruel, ungenerous, unwomanly deed!"

"I cannot tell you," she answered, dreadingly—"you hate me enough already."

"That is quite certain!" he retorted, with emphasis. "But, frankly speaking, nothing that you can say to me could make the matter worse."

"Have I done so very wrong?" she asked, sadly.

"Wrong!" he echoed, drawing back, and looking at her in amazement. "Surely Heaven will never find pardon for you for what you have done!"

"What can be done?"

"Anyone else would hand you over to the police!" he cried, with indignation; "but I will not do this. I will take you myself where there is no possibility of your doing further harm, until we see the result of this terribly inhuman work of yours. Come with me."

He took her by the white wrist, and forced her to accompany him back to the house.

There was a small room, he remembered, at the back of the library, never used now, which Mr. Barton used to occupy.

Towards this he took her, and thrusting the door open, bid her enter.

"Stay here until I come for you," he said, severely. "Make no outcry."

He turned and quitted the room, looking the door on the outside, then hurried swiftly down the corridor.

"Oh, Heaven! how can I believe it—that she, whom I once thought little less than an angel, should have tried to shoot my bride down at the very altar! Oh, this is horrible! Yes, yes; I myself must keep her under close surveillance to await my darling's injuries."

He scarcely knew how he reached the drawing-room again.

As he knew before he dashed out so hastily, Paula was only stunned. The terrible bullet had but grazed her brow.

The servants were all gathered around Paula. Miss Dawes and the pastor, too, panic-stricken to do anything.

Miss Dawes was supporting the head of the stricken girl in her lap.

Gregor threw himself down on his knees beside his darling with a bitter groan.

"I am afraid the difficulty will not end here," said the clergyman, laying his hand gently on Gregor's shoulder. "Come away; I have something to tell you." He drew him to the opposite side of the room. "Can you hear a great shock?" he said, gently.

Gregor looked up at him hurriedly, searchingly.

"Speak quickly, in Heaven's name! I can endure anything but suspense."

"You will promise that you will not allow the blow to unman you?"

"I will bear it, no matter how heavy or bitter the blow is," returned Gregor, hoarsely but manfully, with a great attempt at calmness.

"The shock has been more harmful to your bride-elect than the first glance revealed. Once before I witnessed just such another case, and the young girl who was startled so cruelly had better have died then and there, for the shock left her blind, dumb, and paralyzed for life. Heaven witness me! I repeat it was the most horrible blighting of a fair young life that I ever beheld, and I never thought I would behold such another."

Gregor Thorpe reeled back, catching at a chair for support.

"Surely—surely you cannot mean it! I would die if anything so horrible happened to my darling! Let doctors be sent for, quick! We are wasting time."

"They have already been summoned," returned the minister. "We are expecting them every moment. Ah! here comes one now."

Upon the entrance of the doctor, Gregor rushed to him and clutched his hand.

"Do everything to save her!" he cried, excitedly, pointing to Paula. "Save her from the calamity that threatens her, and I will make you a wealthy man for life. You shall have every penny of my fortune!"

Kindly hands bore Paula to her room. The grief of Gregor Thorpe was something terrible to behold. Miss Dawes quite thought he was losing

his reason. When she appealed to the physician he said:

"Let his grief have full sway. The fiercer the storm, the sooner it will wear itself out."

At last Miss Dawes went to Gregor with a glass of wine.

"Drink this," she said; "it will give you new life."

He drained it to the dregs, knowing not that a sleeping potion had been administered with it.

But it did not produce the desired effect. Sleep he could not; his nerves were too much on fire for that; but it had the effect of quieting somewhat his turbulent grief.

"If you cannot rest, I would advise you to go out into the open air for a little," said Miss Dawes. "The bracing air will refresh you wonderfully."

Reluctantly he took her advice. All unimpaired that poor Mildred was held a prisoner under lock and key in the wing of the house where no servant's foot ever trod now, Gregor Thorpe walked slowly from the house, down the path strewn with dead leaves, and out into the busy street.

It never occurred to him in which direction he was going. He walked for long hours aimlessly on, striking at length into a lonely road on the outskirts of the city. The road was difficult and dangerous as it was lonely and unfrequented.

Slowly, stealthily, like a thief in the night, drowsiness crept over him. His brain felt heavy and his senses benumbed.

He thought he was tired, and flung himself down on a log to rest, and ere he was aware, despite the chill breeze, he fell into a deep, unbroken sleep.

Slowly the sun dipped low in the west. Dark gathered, and still Gregor Thorpe slept on. The stars came out one by one, and fixed themselves in a blue dome overhead, as if keeping vigil.

The same stars, too, watched over poor noble Mildred, so cruelly misjudged, who was pacing the floor of a small darkened room in which she found herself a prisoner. Ah, dear Heaven! what could it mean!

The long hours dragged themselves by slowly. Why was she so cruelly punished? she wondered. Did the supposed sin of which he believed her guilty seem so very hideous in his eyes? What would he say if he knew she was as guiltless as a babe or even the faintest shadow of wrong-doing?

That there had been any crime committed—an attempt made on Paula's life—Mildred had not even the faintest suspicion.

CHAPTER XL

No sleep came to Mildred's eyes during all the long hours of the night which she spent in pacing up and down the length of the narrow, darkened room.

Gregor had said to her in that first bewildered moment in which he had discovered the hat and coat, and she had taken the blame all upon herself, that she must leave the house and never darken its door again.

Now, why had he brought her here himself and turned the key upon her, preventing her from leaving?

Mildred was quite bewildered by the circumstances, as well she might be. What had he meant by those soothing words he had said to her a few hours before?

Another sun rose; another moon dragged itself wearily by.

She had tasted neither food nor drink. She felt faint and weak. But, oh, Heaven! the anguish of heart, the chaos of thoughts that racked her brain and completely overwhelmed her!

At that self-same moment Gregor Thorpe awoke to consciousness and to the events that were transpiring around him.

Greatly bewildered, he saw the sun shining high in the heavens.

It had been almost dark when he sat down on that log to rest, he remembered, and now it was midday.

He felt cramped and exhausted, and rose from his seat on the log with the utmost difficulty.

How had it happened that he had fallen asleep while his heart was so torn with grief? He could not imagine.

He walked to the nearest cab-stand, and was soon at Paula's home.

As the cab whirled quickly on he remembered all, and thoughts of Mildred and her imprisonment in the room in which he had locked her flashed over his mind.

He hastened up the broad walk in great alarm. The door stood ajar. He entered without ceremony.

In the corridor he met the doctor, who was just coming from Paula's apartment.

Gregor grasped him with both hands and looked eagerly into his face.

"Is she better?" he cried, hoarsely.

"I cannot tell you an untruth," replied the doctor, bluntly. "She is just the same."

Gregor Thorpe's hands fell nervously at his side. All the pity he felt for Mildred and his forgetfulness of her died when he heard that. His face hardened, and something very like an imprecation broke from his lips against Mildred.

"It would be best for you not to see Miss Barton," the doctor went on. "She must have absolute quiet."

"Is it as bad as that, doctor?" asked Gregor, huskily, and a pain like the thrust of a sharp dagger smote his heart.

"It could not be worse," was the slow reply.

From that moment all the gentleness and chivalry in his nature seemed to die out.

If Mildred had been anything else but a woman, he told himself, he would have taken a terrible vengeance upon her.

He turned from the doctor and walked slowly down the corridor.

No one observed him as he saw, and he hastily entered the library, passing to the door that led to the small room beyond. He flung open the door and stood for a moment on the threshold, contemplating the scene within.

There was no light save that which penetrated from the stained-glass windows of the arched ceiling.

Through one of these the noon sun was shining brightly, suffusing the room with a bright crimson glow.

It shone upon the oaken floor, costly statues, pictures and bric-à-brac in this secret chamber in which Mr. Barton had kept his treasures.

On a crimson velvet divan in the centre of the room lay Mildred sleeping the sleep of exhaustion. Her noble face was upturned, and her hands were clasped as if she had been praying.

How pale and wan her face looked! What an innocent expression there was on it! Who would think, to behold her as she lay there, that she was such an incarnate fiend? he asked himself.

Slowly her lips moved, and she heaved a deep, troubled sigh.

"Gregor!" he heard her murmur faintly, "I should have been happy enough in this life had I never met you. My great fault was that I loved you too well. It has been death in life to give you up to her."

Gregor Thorpe stood irresolute in the doorway. He quite believed Mildred had committed a terrible crime; but when he heard those piteous words, of how fatally she loved him, and believed that this sin had been committed because of her love for him, how hard the thought was of giving her up to the minions of the law.

Better far to take charge of her himself—to await Paula's recovery. But where could he take her for safe keeping? It was the question he asked himself over and over again.

Suddenly he thought of a safe retreat he had read of only a few weeks before—a place where a favoured few of the wealthy, who could pay the price for it, could take their friends to recover from a protracted case of alcoholism.

No questions were asked in this beautiful home-like retreat; but the eminent respectability of anyone who sought admission there must be vouched for by prominent people.

"The very place!" said Gregor to himself.

"I will take her there at once."

He crossed the room and bent over her.

"Mildred—Miss Garetin," he said, sternly.

The girl started.



GREGOR FLUNG HIMSELF DOWN ON A LOG TO REST, AND SOON FELL INTO A DEEP, UNBROKEN SLEEP.

"Is it you!" she gasped, looking at him with dismayed eyes, that grew humid and troubled as she encountered the cold, severe expression of his face.

"You will come with me," he said, briefly and firmly.

She drew back and looked at him hesitatingly.

"May I ask by what right you have detained me here, and why you speak to me so authoritatively!"

He looked at her in great surprise.

"I should think you would understand that," he said, significantly.

"But where do you wish to take me—back to Mrs. Morris's?"

"That you shall learn very soon," he responded.

"Come with me."

Without another word, Mildred followed him from the room.

The door of the breakfast-room stood open; but there was no one to touch the repast which was spread as usual for the family.

"You have need of refreshment," he was about to add. "Forgive me for keeping you from food and drink so long," but he remembered that he must not give her one word of kindness, and he bit his lips to keep back what he was about to say.

"You must be hungry," he said, by way of awkward apology.

"No," she answered, in her sad, sweet voice; and she said to herself that it was well he did not know that hers was the hunger of the heart and soul.

"Come in and take some toast and tea at least," he said, authoritatively; and she obeyed him as trustingly, as implicitly as a little child might have done.

Yes, she was hungry. She did not realize it until food was set before her.

He stood leaning against the mantelpiece and looked at her thoughtfully.

Who would ever imagine her cruel enough to undertake the dastardly deed which she had been guilty of! She looked so fair, so spiritual, and

so innocent—the very embodiment of all that was sweet and pure and womanly.

As in a dream, all the past drifted slowly before him. If it had not been for a fate most strange, Mildred would at this moment have been his wife.

He tried to shudder at the idea; but somehow the thought brought him no repugnance, and he was amazed at himself that it did not.

She raised her eyes suddenly, and found him looking at her intently; but she could not fathom the thought that accompanied his searching gaze.

When she had finished, she rose quietly from the table and turned towards him.

"You are ready!" he interrogated.

"Yes," she said, simply and gravely, and there was still that look of wonder in her dark, wistful eyes.

He led her quickly from the house, down the broad gravelled walk to the pavement, halting the first passing cab.

But here Mildred again drew back.

"This is an unheard-of procedure, Mr. Thorpe," she said, with simple dignity. "I decline to accompany you without knowing where you are going and why you take this unusual interest in me, or in anything that concerns me. I am puzzled, bewildered."

"You should be satisfied that you are in my care," he returned, quickly; and those words amazed and dumfounded her more than ever.

She allowed him to place her in the vehicle, feeling quite sure he intended to take her to Mrs. Morris's.

He sat down opposite her and bowed his handsome head on his white hand, never raising it once during all the long streets that they traversed.

Once she asked him if they were not going to Mrs. Morris's, and he was almost about to betray himself by answering "No," when he recollected and held his tongue, averting his face—for his position troubled him, and he wondered how it would all end.

"We will soon reach our destination," he said.

"Yes," she answered, softly, with a low sigh and looking at him wistfully.

The carriage stopped at length before a large stone building. Thorpe sprang from the vehicle and held out his hand for her to alight.

"I shall not enter this strange place!" said Mildred, in affright.

"Remember, you are under my protection," he repeated, gravely.

"I decline," said Mildred, and showing more haughtiness of spirit than he ever dreamed she possessed.

"You must come," he said, very firmly but gently; "it is for your own good."

"I am the best judge of that," she said, quickly.

A puzzled look swept over his face. What was he to do in this dilemma? What should he say!

"I promise you protection, on my honour," he said, in an agony of entreaty.

But still she was firm in her refusal.

"Mildred," he said, solemnly, turning towards her with a look she had never seen on his face before, "if you refuse to accompany me you will regret it to the last day of your life. I speak plainly because I feel so deeply in this matter."

But his words did not penetrate the girl's dulled brain, and he saw that she had fallen back in a dead faint against the cushions of the carriage.

"It is better so," he murmured, huskily, as he raised the slim figure in his strong arms and bore her into the building.

He did not know—Heaven help him—that it was said that few who entered that door ever came out of it alive.

Already a shadow no larger than a bird's wing had crossed Mildred's path, and in the future the lowering storm-clouds would suddenly burst upon her hapless head, sowing the seeds that were soon to end in the greatest tragedy the world ever knew.

(To be continued.)



SIR RONALD LOOKED AT LILLIAN STRAIGHTLY: "DID MY QUESTION OFFEND YOU?" HE ASKED.

NAMELESS.

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CHAPTER IX.

It is probable that Daisy and Pansy would have missed Mr. Darby's frequent companionship much more, and that their enquiries to their governess would have been still more perplexing, than was the case, but that the very day after the Rector's proposal tidings came from Lady Dacres that she was returning in a week's time, and that the Castle would be filled with guests.

The children were wonderfully elated, though terribly afraid of their stepmother; they had a real, childish love of gaiety, and the thought of the company and an expedition to Monmouth, to provide them with clothes for the festive occasion, absorbed all their thoughts.

Lillian did not share their delight. Could she have chosen she would have continued that peaceful, dreamy life much longer, for although by nature free from superstitious fancies, she had a nameless dread of Lady Dacres, which absence had strengthened instead of weakened.

She had never forgotten that episode of Guy Ainslie's letter; and an awful terror had fixed itself on her that the words Lady Dacres spoke concerning his engagement had a very different meaning from the one she had then applied to them.

It was impossible that Guy Ainslie had been engaged twice, therefore Lady Dacres meant that she herself was separated from him by an obstacle. Oh! horror. She had added she hoped the obstacle would be removed.

Could it be that after selling herself for gold she could actually look forward to her husband's death as restoring her to her old lover!

Two people had warned Lillian against any lady on two different occasions. Both must have been sincere.

The man who had loved her could not have

accused her falsely, and Archibald Darby was of too chivalrous a nature to wrong any woman.

The double warning rang unpleasantly in poor Lillian's ears, and she dreaded, with all her heart, the return to the Castle of its mistress.

After all, her fears seemed groundless. Lady Dacres came into the school-room, looking more beautiful than ever, and Lillian saw at once that she was brighter and happier than she had been when she went away.

She kissed her step-children, and shook hands with their governess.

"You look flourishing, Miss Green! Well!" The "well" was so determined that poor Lillian blushed.

"Am I to congratulate you?"

"Please not!"

"You don't mean to say it isn't settled yet? Why, he seemed in such a hurry!"

Pansy and her sister had escaped. They never cared to linger long with their step-mother; naturally, perhaps.

"It will never be settled as you mean," said Lillian, gently. "Please do not speak of it!"

"You mean you have refused him?"

"I did not say so, my lady!"

"Well, you are a very foolish girl, and you have made me tell fearful untruths!"

"I!"

"You. Of course, when I went to see the Ainslies, Kate was loud in her inquiries after you; wanted to know if I didn't find you a treasure. Of course I told her you were a treasure, of which the Rector would very soon deprive me!"

"Oh, Lady Dacres!"

"Don't you want to hear what she said?"

"If you please! If it isn't a secret!"

"She said you were much too young to go through the world alone, and that she was very glad you would have some one to protect you!"

"She is very kind!"

"Kate is always kind," and my lady gave a strange, heavy sigh, "and her advice is very good if one can only follow it!"

"It must have been pleasant for you to see Leckenham again."

"Why?" very abruptly. "Who told you I liked it?"

"You told me yourself it was your old home!"

"It doesn't do to revisit old haunts, Miss Green," said my lady, and her voice was full of quiet sadness. "I slept one night at Leckenham while Sir John was in Scotland, and I declare to you I cried myself to sleep!"

She hurried out of the room then, as though half-ashamed of her confession, and Lillian was still wondering at it, when another visitor honoured the schoolroom—no less a person than Sir John—who came in with a little girl clinging to each hand.

It dawned on the governess then that he did love his children dearly, only fear of vexing his idolized wife prevented him from openly showing his affection.

"Well, Miss Green," he said pleasantly, "and how have you been getting on? What kind of summer have you spent?"

Lillian answered simply that it had been very pleasant, and then the baronet took her hand, and pressed it with unusual warmth.

"You must not think me ungrateful, my dear young lady," he said gravely. "I can never thank you enough for your care of my poor little girls; they look like different creatures, so happy and well behaved. I hope you don't find them very troublesome!"

"I am very fond of children, Sir John; I never find it troublesome to have them with me!"

"Ah!" and he was silent for a minute. "Well, I told Mr. Ainslie we owed his sister a great deal for sending you here. I wish my wife liked children."

A little silence, and then, with a courtly grace which told of his long descent, he begged Lillian's acceptance of a present, a simple spray of ivy in filigree silver, more tasteful than valu-

able, and yet which showed she had not been forgotten.

"From the children, you know," said the baronet kindly. "I hope I shall see you in the drawing-room sometimes, Miss Green; as a friend of my wife's cousins you will always be welcome."

Lilian explained that she could hardly claim the friendship of Mr. and Miss Ainslie; they had been very kind to her, that was all.

"They're kind to everyone, I think," said Sir John, gravely. "I always detested the sound of Guy Ainslie's name until I saw him, and since that I've felt he was a man I should be proud to call my friend. I've asked him down next month, and I hope he'll come."

Exit the baronet and enter my lady's maid, with a message that she should expect to find Miss Green and the children in the drawing-room when the ladies came up from dinner.

Poor Lilian, it was a trial for her when, clad in her plain black dress, she followed her white-frooked pupils downstairs. She need not have feared being noticed, for none of the ladies present deemed it their duty to address the governess. Lilian would be quite free to use her eyes and ears, and the first thing that struck her was the peculiar plainness of the guests. Could Lady Dacres have selected her visitors on purpose that they might serve as foils to her own brilliant, bewitching beauty? For a moment this idea crossed Lilian's mind; then she grew pale as death. She felt as though she was suddenly sinking through the ground. The Dacres' drawing-room faded from her view, and in fancy she saw herself again at Earlsmere listening to a man's impassioned love story.

And what had wrought this change? Simply that the door had opened to admit the gentlemen, and that among Sir John's honoured guests Lilian recognised the man who had wooed her in the days of her prosperity—Sir Ronald Trevlyn, Baronet, of Trevlyn Court.

CHAPTER X

To go back for a brief space to that short autumn day when Lilian Earl took her fate into her own hands; when, standing by the water's edge Captain Beaumont and Mr. Martin, clever, shrewd men of the world though they were, could come to no other conclusion than that Lord Earl's adopted child, for whom there seemed no home on earth, had sought one in the clear, sparkling water.

Angry with themselves for losing sight of her—angry with the strange mystery which hung over her history—both men yet were still more incensed against Sir Ronald Trevlyn.

"Had he kept true to her," growled the Captain, "this would never have happened! She was no coward; no poverty, no grief for her father's death, would have driven her to such a deed. Sir Ronald is as much her murderer as though he had put a bullet through her heart; only unfortunately, as our law stands, no punishment can befall him. The scorn of all true men, the contempt of good women, will be his reward. I shouldn't care to show my face in public if I were Sir Ronald, when this story is noised abroad."

Telegraphing to his wife not to expect him until the next day, Mr. Martin accompanied the Captain to Trevlyn Court, and demanded to speak with its master.

Sir Ronald made no demur about admitting them. If Lilian were going to yield to his wishes, and consent to elope with him, it was just as well he should present a bold front to her temporary guardians—it would throw their suspicions off the scent.

He descended to the library to meet his visitors; they both stood facing the door, and neither of them noticed the baronet's extended hand, or heeded his entreaty to be seated. There they stood with grave, stern dignity, as though they hated the duty which brought them there, and were yet constrained to discharge it.

"Sir Ronald Trevlyn," began Mr. Martin, as

his friend signed to him to tell the story, "I have come here with Captain Beaumont to acquaint you with the news of your betrothed's death."

Sir Ronald started.

"Are you jesting?"

"We should not jest on such a subject," said the Captain. "My dead cousin's adopted child—the girl you promised to protect while you lived—has taken her own life, driven to it by the neglect of all truth and honour shown by yourself."

"You speak harshly."

"I do not stop to measure my words. This morning she was in the pride of youth and beauty—to-night she is dead and cold, the shadow of a sin resting on her name; but Sir Ronald Trevlyn, in Heaven's sight, and before the Great Judge of all, that sin is yours, not hers. Lilian's death lies at your door; you will have to answer to Lord Earl at the last day for his darling's fate."

He never waited for his answer, but turned on his heel and left the room, followed closely by his friend. Before Sir Ronald had recovered from the shock of the accusation sufficiently to resent it he was alone!

Alone! Alone with the memory of a girl's fair face and lustrous, dark blue eyes to haunt him. Alone with the guilt of murder, as they told him, on his soul!

Search was made in every direction—the river was dragged to find the remains of the lost girl, but they were never recovered.

The current was too fast for this to excite wonder; and the whole village shared the opinion of Mr. Martin and the Captain, that Lilian Earl had met her death in those treacherous waters. And from many an honest voice there rose a curse upon Sir Ronald Trevlyn.

For two months Sir Ronald lingered at the Court, bearing the odium which had fallen on him as best he could, believing that in time the memory of Lilian's fate and his share in it would be forgotten.

Then his mother died almost suddenly, and the last tie which bound him to the place was gone.

For her sake he had held to Trevlyn with the frantic eagerness of a drowning man who catches at a straw.

When she was dead he ceased to struggle with fate.

The Court was sold for a good round sum, the mortgages paid off, and a new wealthy owner prepared to live in the house once destined for Lilian; while the baronet, with what remained to him of the purchase money after his debts were paid, came up to London, hoping that the stain which rested on his honour and made him a banned man in his own county was unknown to the denizens of Belgrave and Mayfair.

He was right. There were few wealthy people near his home, and the hatred of the poor does not travel to London and impress the upper ten thousand against its object.

Sir Ronald found himself very favourably received.

Young and handsome, the last of a grand old family, Society opened wide its arms to the fascinating baronet.

Of course he was a bad match, but then he was an ornament to any ball-room. And he made himself very agreeable, so that hostesses voted him an acquisition.

He always seemed to have plenty of money, he had paid all his debts; he could hardly be quite so badly off as people said.

Sir Ronald haunted ball-rooms and operas. He never refused an invitation to a dance.

He was playing a desperate game—his money would not keep him much more than a year.

Before that was gone he must contrive to find a wealthy wife—an heiress who would be glad to change her plebeian gold for the grand old name of Trevlyn.

But, though he was popular enough, Sir Ronald found a great deal of trouble in deciding which young lady should have the honour of becoming Lady Trevlyn.

He wanted money; but he was a beauty-lover.

He could not have borne to spend his life with a plain woman.

Now heiresses are not always noted for their beauty, and so the season waned, and still the Society papers had not chronicled the baronet's engagement.

It was late in May before he became intimate with the Dacres.

Vivian's brilliant, bewitching beauty won his fervent admiration.

Sir John was a useful person to know, and so it came about that Sir Ronald and the Dacres grew on very familiar terms.

In public he was the husband's friend and companion—in private he became Vivian's confident and adviser.

She was new to the world of London life, and he guided her footsteps.

Neither of them dreamed of love. It would have been fatal to his interests, while all the affection of her heart was given elsewhere.

They were simply allies—allies who found time pass pleasantly if spent together, and who were the best of friends because neither of them desired to overstep friendship's barrier.

"Do you know your husband has invited me to Dacres Castle?" he asked her one afternoon, when he rode beside her carriage in the Park.

"Has he? What did you say?"

"I left it open until you had endorsed his invitation. Shall I bore you, Lady Dacres?"

"No, but you will bore yourself."

"Not in your society."

"Don't pay compliments," and her colour deepened. "In plain English, Sir Ronald, my husband's castle is the dreariest place I ever saw. We spent the winter there, and it nearly killed me."

"But that was the honeymoon," he said, in a light, bantering tone. "You ought not to have been dull then."

"The honeymoon was over ages before. I shall fill the house with company, Sir Ronald, and you will be very welcome if you come; only I warn you, it will be very dull."

"I am not afraid of that; I shall come."

"Then I will invite Miss Cash."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"You ungrateful man! It is entirely for your benefit. I can't endure the fair Sophia myself!"

"Then why inflict her on me?"

"Because rumour has it that she is to be Lady Trevlyn; and it will be a little amusement for me to watch the development of your romance. When one is married and done for one's self match-making is a great resource."

Sir Ronald did not deny the rumour she had alluded to. Vivian looked serious.

"Is it so?" she asked. "Come, Sir Ronald, confide in me, and I will help you to the utmost of my power. You don't know the interest I take in other people's love affairs!"

"I shall never have a love affair. Lady Dacres, do you despise a man because he's poor?"

"No,"—thinking of one man she loved, whom the world called poor, and whom she certainly did not despise—"but I think poverty is very depressing."

"And being poor, being cut off by pride from trade, what resource is there to me but to marry money?"

"Which means, you contemplate sacrificing yourself at the shrine of the fair Sophia. She has twenty thousand a year, I believe; so you won't be poor if you marry her."

Sir Ronald looked straight into Vivian's dusky eyes.

"If cruel fate debars me from marrying for love—if she whom I worship is another's—am I to blame for considering the dictates of prudence?"

Vivian blushed. Of course, he meant herself. It never offends a woman to be beloved. Lady Dacres might have felt affronted if Sir Ronald had spoken of marrying some one as young and beautiful as herself; but she could not grudge him such consolation as Miss Cash's plain face offered.

"No; you are very rational. Then you will go down with us to the Castle next month, and Miss Cash shall meet you; she's a great favour-

ite with Sir John. I believe he sometimes regrets that I do not resemble her."

Sir Ronald laughed.

"That's quite impossible!"

Sophia Cash was a young lady of nearly thirty, of large fortune, and thoroughly presentable family. Sir John and her father had been intimate, and the baronet had been her guardian. She was plain to a degree, but she possessed a brave, kindly heart, a generous disposition, and a mild, equable temper. There were many who thought she would have made a better step-mother for Daisy and Pansy than penniless beautiful Vivian Ormond. Perhaps Miss Cash shared the opinion herself; but, all the same, she was on friendly terms with the young bride, and had visited her pretty frequently during the season.

"Of course, you will come to us, Sophia!" said Sir John, when the invitation was given; "Daisy and Pansy will be delighted to renew their acquaintance with you."

"And so will someone else," said his wife, archly. "Miss Cash, do you know Sir Ronald Trevlyn is coming to us on purpose to meet you!"

"I am glad he will be there," said the lady, complacently. "I like Sir Ronald, Lady Dacres."

"And he does something more than like you," whispered her beautiful hostess. "Oh, Miss Cash, do take pity on our dulness, and settle the affair at the Castle. It would be a charming place for a wedding! We have a beautiful church, the handsomest rector for miles round; and I will lend you Daisy and Pansy as bridesmaids."

Well, no more was said on the subject, but Sir Ronald accompanied Sir John and Lady Dacres to the Castle; and it was quite settled that Miss Cash would join the party in a day or two.

The arrangement was a relief to Ronald Trevlyn in the present state of his finances. A month's hospitality at such a house as Dacres Castle was not to be despised.

And then Sir John was a generous, liberal host; my lady had the art of entertaining at her fingers' ends; and the woman he had made up his mind to wed would be in the same house, ready for him to expend all his eloquence on the wedding.

He was a long time dressing for dinner, and his thoughts wandered from the present wooing to one that had been brief and hapless, and which had begun and ended only a few months before.

He had never sorrowed for Lillian Earl as Guy Ainslie had grieved over the loss of Vivian, but, in his way, he had missed her. He had never quite forgiven her for escaping him—for preferring an early self-sought grave to life at his side. He knew in his heart that he had never really meant, after Captain Beaumont's tidings, to marry Lillian.

The elopement once agreed to, he would have known how to arrange a ceremony which while it seemed to the trusting girl a private marriage would yet not make her his wife, but leave him free to bestow that title upon an heiress.

He never meant to have made Lillian Lady Trevlyn; but he meant to have been kind to her, and to have loved her always as much as it was in his nature to love anyone. He had felt sure of her consent, and lo! she had escaped him, choosing a means of escape which left a lasting blight upon his name in the minds of all who knew the story.

She was dead! her short life had ended months before. At most he had known her only a few weeks, and yet—how her face haunted him!—yet she had been dearer to him than any woman.

"I wonder who she was!" he thought, as he arranged his white tie before the glass. "Her grace and beauty were beyond anything I have seen this season. She was nameless and obscure, and yet had she been presented at Court all London would have raved about her. Poor child! she must have cared for me, to take her own life just because she could not belong to me before all the world. I suppose it is better for me as it is. Such an entanglement might have blinded my wedding; and marriage is an unfortunate necessity."

He went downstairs to dinner. He was the life and soul of that gay party, and yet all the while a girl's fair face haunted him; he seemed to see two dark blue eyes, and hear a sweet voice asking him whether his love would last for ever. Alas! alas! it was barely a year ago, and already that love was cold and dead. Already he was wishing to give his name to another woman.

Sir Ronald wondered a little that his hostess had not arranged for Miss Cash to arrive with him. His destined bride being absent, he did not hurry to the drawing-room, but entered it with a stream of other men in time for coffee.

His eyes wandered round the room as he sought Lady Dacres. They soon discovered her on a sofa, and then they caught sight of another face, younger, and as fair as hers, and for one moment Sir Ronald deemed his eyes were playing him false.

Was it—could it be! Were there two girls with that bright, ethereal beauty, those dark, expressive eyes! Was this only some perplexing resemblance to Lillian? or was it the real Lillian herself, and had that story of her death been a malicious fabrication!

Sir Ronald took a seat where he could command a full view of the young lady, and set himself to unravel the problem. If this were indeed Lillian—if she had deceived him and let him bear the reproach of driving her to destruction unjustly—he would never forgive her; he would grudge no time, spare no effort to ruin the girl who had dared to escape his cruel plans. If this were Lillian, then, indeed he, Ronald, was her sworn foe.

But he was sure it could not be. Mr. Martin and Captain Beaumont were men of honour; they would not have come to him with a trumped-up story.

Besides, the emotion in their voices, the anger with which they spoke, all proved that they, at least, were convinced of the reality of Lillian's death.

An inquiry of his host for the children was Sir Ronald's first step. The father, delighted at the introduction, led up the little girls, and the guest did his best to make friends with them. He was not used to children, but the little Dacres were very simple and intelligent; they responded to his advances with frank cordiality; promised to show him the park and to take him round the picture-gallery. Pansy even included an invitation to the schoolroom to see her white kitten.

"And how is it I never saw you in London!" asked Sir Ronald, when he found an opportunity.

"Oh! we stayed at home."

"All alone! Poor little maids!"

"Oh! it was very nice. No, we weren't alone; Miss Green took care of us."

"She is your governess?"

"Yes! Isn't she pretty?"

"How can I tell!"

"Why, you've seen her?"

"No!"

"She is over there, in a black dress; she always wears black because her papa died last year."

"Poor thing!"

"She isn't poor," protested Daisy; "she is very happy, she said so the other day."

"And you like her?"

"To be sure. You see, we did have such a dreadful time before she came—and we expected some one old and horrid."

"Miss Green certainly is not old."

"No; nor horrid. I'm sure I shall never forget when she came last winter; things were so black and she made them all so bright!"

"Daisy, you are disturbing Sir Ronald." Of course the interruption came from Lady Dacres. Daisy and her sister looked scared. "Go back to Miss Green directly," ordered the stepmother, "and tell her I think it is time for you to leave the drawing-room."

"May I congratulate you!" whispered Sir Ronald, mischievously, when the children were out of earshot.

"What on?"

"Your children—they are charming little maids."

"I hate children, they don't trouble me much. Fortunately, they have a rare avis of a governess, who never wants any holidays."

"What an obliging person!"

"She is peculiar altogether. She is quite alone in the world, and as poor as a church mouse, and yet she refused a most eligible offer the other day. I spoke to her about it, of course, and she had the impertinence to tell me it was her own affair!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE days that followed were full of care and perplexity for Lillian. She could not tell whether Sir Ronald recognised her.

The children had duly presented her to him when he chanced to meet them in one of their rambles, and he had shaken hands with her in a perfectly composed manner.

He addressed her as a stranger; only once or twice he made an almost imperceptible pause in speaking her name, as though it had quite escaped him, or were a matter of doubt.

He declared he had lost his way, and attached himself to the schoolroom party to be escorted back to the Castle quite as a matter of course, although Lillian showed pretty plainly he was unwelcome.

"You will show me the way, won't you?" he said, pleadingly, to the little girl. "Miss Green,"—to Lillian—"you won't enjoy your own luncheon if you think of me wandering aimlessly about without any."

He talked chiefly to the children during the walk, but as they were nearing the house he suddenly asked Lillian,—

"Were you ever in Blankshire, Miss Green?"

"I have been very little in England," she returned. "I think I know no county really well except Monmouthshire."

He looked at her steadily.

"Did my question offend you?"

"Not at all. Why do you ask?"

"Because, pardon me, you did not answer it," and then he devoted his attention to the children, leaving the governess to digest his words.

It was not a pleasant prospect they had conjured up.

If he, indeed, recognised her, it was in his power to tell her whole history to Lady Dacres; and Lillian realised sadly that things would look very black against her. An impostor, a pretended suicide! Sir Ronald might describe her by all these names, if it seemed good to him.

Miss Cash's arrival created a diversion. From childhood she had visited at the Castle, and the little girls knew her well. She managed to spare time to come pretty often to the schoolroom, and she was very kind to the beautiful, fair young governess.

"You look fagged to death!" she said, coming in late one evening, on her way to her own room. "Miss Green, I shall tell Lady Dacres that you are overworked, and need a holiday."

"Please don't," said Lillian, piteously. "Oh, Miss Cash, promise me you won't!"

"Of course I won't, if you ask me not; but, seriously, you look quite ill!"

"I am a little tired."

"Children troublesome?"

"Oh, no!"

"Private troubles, eh? Or are you suffering from the English complaint called home-sickness? Come, tell me!"

"I could not suffer from that, Miss Cash."

"Why not?"

"I have no home to long for!"

"No home at your age! Why you look a perfect child!"

"I am nineteen!"

"And you really have no home?"

"So really, that if Lady Dacres insisted on my taking a holiday, I should only go into lonely lodgings! I am happier with the children, Miss Cash, than alone in London!"

"But haven't you any relations?" asked the heiress, bluntly.

"Not one in the world!"

Sophia was touched. She bent over the bowed head and kissed the fair, white brow.

"You are like me. I have neither kith nor kin. But, Miss Green, there is a relationship nearer than father or mother, brother or sister, and I hope you may choose to fill it to some good man. I have heard that the decision rests with you."

Lillian blushed.

The heiress continued,—

"When one is alone in the world, marriage is a terrible temptation. Miss Green, won't you congratulate me on yielding to it?"

The girl smiled. No thought of the truth came to her.

"Are you going to be married? I hope you will be very happy, I am sure, Miss Cash."

"And you don't ask me whom I am going to make happy. Come, guess!"

"I know so few people," said Lillian, apologetically, "I really can form no idea."

"Well, it is no secret, though it was only settled this afternoon. Everyone knows all about it; and Lady Dacres is busy planning my wedding. As I used to be a kind of ward of Sir John's, she is good enough to wish me to be married from the Castle."

A faint dread seized Lillian; not for herself. All love for Ronald Trevlyn had died out of her heart long ago, but she was full of pity for the generous woman before her. What would her life be like linked to Ronald's?

"You have not told me the name," she said, hoping against hope she was mistaken.

"I am to be Lady Trevlyn!"

Lillian turned so white that a momentary suspicion crossed Miss Cash that her lover had been flirting with Lady Dacres' pretty governess.

"What is the matter?" she asked, sharply.

"Nothing, except a pain in my side. I often have it at night when I am over-tired."

"Indigestion!"

"Very likely. Shall you live at Trevlyn Court when you are married, Miss Cash?"

"Oh dear no; the Court has been sold months ago. Sir Ronald is about as poor as a church mouse; but then, you see, I am very rich, so we shall get on pretty comfortably!"

"I hope you will be happy."

"I hope so. They say marriage is a lottery; but I don't think either of us are romantic, and we are old enough to know our own minds," then, quite forgetting the suspicion which had troubled her, she kissed the governess affectionately, and bade her good-night.

"She will be his wife," thought Lillian.

"Lady Trevlyn; rich, courted, honoured; but, oh, I pity her! I would rather be as I am, nameless, poor, and obscure, than be Lady Trevlyn, for he will break her heart! He pretended to love me; he tried to lure me to my ruin. He is hard and cold; there is no pity in his nature!"

She spoke the words half aloud in her agony; a struggle was going on in her heart. Miss Cash had shown her many a little kindness; she of all the party at the Castle had been the only one to remember that the governess was young and gently reared, with tastes and feelings like their own.

Heiress though she was, she had found time to spend many a half-hour in the schoolroom, and to do much to brighten Lillian's life; and now the girl heard she was to be married to a man utterly unworthy of her—who would embitter her whole future!

No wonder she longed to go boldly to Miss Cash and warn her of the character of her betrothed—no wonder that in her emotion she spoke her opinion of him aloud.

"A very pretty sentiment!" said a mocking voice in her ear. "Pray were you imparting your opinion of me to my fiancée? I see that she has just left you."

Sir Ronald was at her elbow. He had entered, unperceived, in time to hear her last words.

There was a look of bitter anger upon his handsome face. He was not in a passion; his displeasure was that cold, determined rage, which is more vindictive than the fiercest invectives.

"I did not impart my sentiments to Miss Cash," returned Lillian, proudly.

"But you mean to?"

She was silent. In very truth she had been deliberating that question within herself.

"It matters little," said Sir Ronald, mockingly. "I am a gentleman and a baronet. My whole life is open for her inspection. Do you think she would believe accusations launched at me by a nameless impostor?"

All doubt was solved then. He had recognised her; he knew she was his sometime betrothed—the girl men had once called Lillian Earl!

Was he thinking of the days when she had been his own, when it had been his right to take what kisses he pleased from those full, arched lips?

Was he contrasting her girlish grace, her fair ethereal loveliness, with the robust form and plain face of his heiress fiancée?

"The farce had better end now!" he said, roughly. "You are the girl Lord Earl tried to palm off upon society as his daughter. Your name may be Green; I can't exactly prove that it is not, but I know enough of your past history to make Lady Dacres consider you an unfit inmate of the Castle. You are in my power, Lillian. Do you hear? In my power for all time!"

She looked at him, and her heart sank. As well ask pity of the nether millstone as seek it at his hands!

One wild longing came to her that Guy Athelstan was at her side, one vain regret that Archibald Darby, who loved her so truly and so well, was not there to cope with her enemy; then she summoned her courage and turned to him.

"I have never injured you, Sir Ronald—never once. Why should you seek to blight my life?"

"You were mine," he said, passionately; "you were mine, and you escaped me!"

"Say, rather, that when I lost name and fortune I lost your love too," she corrected him. "Love do I call it! It can never have deserted that name, or you would not threaten me!"

"It was love!" said Ronald, fiercely; "such love as I have never felt for any other creature. If you had been Miss Earl—if you had married me—I should have been a different man!"

The words were wrung from him in his anguish. The veins stood out upon his forehead like thick purple cords.

Lillian realised dimly that he had loved her—loved her as much as men like him can do.

"I would have married you," she said, faintly. "The rupture of our engagement came from yourself, Sir Ronald."

"You would have married me, but you demanded a grand public wedding, a luxurious bridal! You would not be content with love; you could not trust me!"

She sighed. She had been very near trusting him; but she had never regretted not doing so, not even during those dreary weeks in London. Since she had seen him again she regretted it still less.

"It was best for you," she said, quietly. "I left you free—free to win a wealthy wife, as I hear you have done."

"You left me to bear the burden of your lies!"

"What do you mean?"

"It was highly melodramatic, no doubt, to commit suicide," he said with a sneer; "and that high-flown captain and the fool of a lawyer were quite taken in by it. Of course they laid your sin at my door—came and preached at me for half-an-hour—declared I had driven you to it."

"I never thought of that," she confessed. "Life was very hard to me. I could not live upon their charity. I could not come to you. The only thing I thought of was to disappear!"

"Ay, without thinking who was to bear the odium of it! That's just like a woman—selfish to the core!"

"But it has not hurt you!" she persisted.

"It has made me an alien from my birthplace. The idiots round Trevlyn chose to lay upon me as your murderer. As soon as my mother died I sold the Court."

He did not tell her that his difficulties necessitated this step even more than his unpopularity, but such was the case.

"I am very sorry," said Lillian, gravely. "All I wanted was to go away, and be no trouble to anyone. I never thought of bringing annoyance on you."

"And you have done well for yourself. I stumble on you at the most luxurious house in the county, amongst the aristocracy."

"Among them, but not of them," quoted Lillian, in a low voice. "Homeless, friendless, the shadow of the past upon me; behind me a past I may not own; in front nothing but one vast loneliness! My lot has little enviable in it, Sir Ronald!"

"They tell me it is not so—that you have found someone willing to overlook your want of birth. I hear you are to be Mr. Darby's wife!"

The girl raised her dark blue eyes to his face, but she spoke no word.

"Tell me," cried Sir Ronald Trevlyn, "is it so? Are you to be Mr. Archibald Darby's wife?"

"What right have you to ask it?"

"The right of loving you," he almost hissed. "Good Heavens, Lillian! do you think I will stand calmly by and see you the wife of another man?"

"How could you prevent it?"

"You had better not try me too far. Do you think a word whispered in Lady Dacres' ear will not change the consideration in which you are held? A clergyman can hardly pardon an acted lie, a wilful fraud, and you have been guilty of both."

"I think he would pardon them," remembering the Rector's words. "I fancy he is too strong and noble himself not to be ready to forgive one who erred through ignorance."

"And you mean to marry him if he will have you, after he hears the story of your life?"

"I repeat you have no right to ask such a question. You are Miss Cash's future husband, not mine."

Sir Ronald laid one hand upon her shoulder, his hot breath fell upon her fair cheek as he cried passionately,—

"I will not leave this room until you have answered me, once for all. Lillian—do you love this man?"

"No!"

The answer was wrung from her in her fear; in another instant she repented it.

Sir Ronald Trevlyn put his arm round her, and kissed her.

"You are mine, Lillian! mine only. You are my first and only love; nothing in the world shall take you from me!"

But the girl broke away from him in passionate indignation.

"How dare you!" she cried, "how dare you insult me so!"

"I love you."

"You choose a strange method of showing it. Once more, will you let me go?"

"When you have answered one question. I thought I had forgotten you, that the memory of the reproach you had cast on me had banished you from my heart. I find it is not so; the witchery of your beauty still enthralled me. Lillian, I must be your dearest love, or your most bitter foe! Speak, say but one word. Which is it to be?"

And in the stillness of that midnight hour, in perfect silence, he waited for her answer. He felt pretty sure what it would be.

(To be continued.)

WHALES' teeth form the coinage of the Fiji Islands. They are painted white and red, the red teeth being worth about twenty times as much as the white. The native carries his wealth round his neck, the red and white of his coinage forming a brilliant contrast to his black skin. A common and curious sight in the Fiji Islands is a newly-married wife presenting her husband with a dowry of whales' teeth.

MY LOVE STORY.

—20—

(Continued from page 57.)

Another minute, and I am reading slowly down the first page. It is not a long letter, and there is no date or heading to it.

It runs thus:—

"Ere you receive this, Madge, I shall be far, far away. We shall not meet again in this world till I can procure proofs of the real murderer—no need to say whose. But, Madge, I ask one favour at your hands in the meantime—that is to try and bring yourself to firmly believe me when I say that, though my hat was found near the body, that though guilty stains were found on my apparel, still, believe me that I assert nothing but the truth when I again say I had no hand in the crime. Life was assuredly extinct when I placed my hand for the first time on the body after I saw it fall there by the stone steps. Time will prove all. When I can bring you proofs, I repeat, I will come to you and ask for a renewal of—"

Here the letter ends abruptly in a broken sentence, as though the writer—

But I grow faint again!

"Father!"

And then all is darkness once more!

Years have passed. I am growing old, but the whole story has come before me in a dream, and I repeat the word "Father!" in my sleep, as the whole miserable tale comes back to me. I am living with my brother, and his two daughters are in the dimly lighted room.

"Auntie, you have been dreaming, I do believe!" says the eldest, Flo.

"Yes, Auntie; you called out 'Father!' so loudly a second since," chimes in Alice.

"I have been dreaming, dears; but it is all over now. Have you gathered your flowers?"

"Yes, Auntie; and, see, here is a sweet little bunch of white rosebuds for you to wear to-night."

White rosebuds for me! Vain mocking of brighter and happier days!

But I must not cloud these two smiling faces, so I accept the offered flowers, and, hanging them against my still brown hair, ask, smilingly, if they are becoming for me.

"Very, Auntie; I never saw you look so pretty!" cries impulsive Flo, as she throws her arms around my neck and kisses me on both cheeks.

Five hours later and we are amid the festive and gay throng of guests assembled in old Major Hardwicke's spacious rooms.

"There is Paul!" whispers Alice to Flo as we three press onward in the gay crowd towards our hostess.

"Yes, and there is Will!" responds Flo.

Later on in the evening I find myself strolling leisurely along in the conservatory. All the young people are dancing, and we chaperons (of whom there are but few) are free for the time being.

On I walk, past huge banks of gay and sweet-scented flowers. I roam till, having gained a rustic seat, I rest awhile.

I am sitting amid the sweet odours of the May-bred flowers, and I can hear from afar the sound of gay laughter intermingled with the strains of the "Ave die Ferne" waltz. I recall my dream of that afternoon.

"The proofs," I murmur, softly, "the proofs! If he would but bring them I might be happy yet! Oh, Clifford! Clifford!" I cry in somewhat louder tones.

And then a something seems to move near me, a rustle amid the screening shrubs, a footstep; then—a man's form is kneeling at my feet!

"Clifford!"

"Madge, I have brought the proofs! Will you see them first?"

"Proofs, Clifford! What care I for proofs!

None can strengthen my firm belief in your innocence," I return softly.

"Thank Heaven, Madge! But still I have brought them, or I shouldn't be here. Madge, may I!"

Ere I can utter the monosyllabic affirmative my own true lover's lips are on mine, and the next moment I am sobbing on his breast.

"Madge, dear, I have been too abrupt. I should have waited; but, oh, how I longed to see your dear face once again, and to read on it my verdict! Madge, dear, forgive me my thoughtlessness!"

"My tears are tears of thankfulness and joy, Clifford. There is nothing for me to forgive. Can you? You know I doubted you at first, and—"

"Say no more, love!" Clifford fondly whispers, so he rises, and seats himself at my side.

"The dread past is, I trust, as a dream that passeth away, while the future—what of the future, Madge, dear?"

"It shall be as bright and happy as I can make it, Clifford," I reply, quietly, but my lover is well satisfied with the look of love which I bestow on him as I speak.

"We will not wait for the New Year, Madge!" he asks presently, after a brief spell of quiet bliss.

"As you will, Clifford," is my simple response.

Then I add in a hushed voice,—

"Burn the proofs, Clifford. But tell me one thing: whose hand—"

"It was a woman's, Madge!"

I ask no farther, but let my head fill its rightful resting-place on the shoulder of my own true lover, and I sigh deeply for very happiness.

My tale is nearly ended, but before I close I must add that my two nieces were only too delighted when they heard of my approaching marriage, which came off one bright, fine October morning.

My bouquet was of pure white rosebuds, while conspicuous in its midst stood out the brown and withered remains of the rose gathered by my lover so many seasons previously, and preserved so carefully by me, and now assisting at my wedding by his wish.

[THE END.]

FOUND WANTING.

—20—

CHAPTER XXII.

PROBABLY in the whole vast city that splendid summer day there was no more unhappy being than Albert Delmar as he walked back to his hotel.

Baffled at every turn, his illusions destroyed, the love he had stuned for shaken to its centre, his own gifts wasted, his blessings scattered to the wind, he had no hopes, no foothold, no place of rest in the whole wide earth.

He was worn and weary with conflict, almost ready to lie down and die, save for his implacable burning hatred against the man who had added one more wrong to his first injury.

He had no distinct volition in all he did after he left Maddie. He did not think "I will go home." He followed some blind impulse, not feeling he was led, turning homewards as a wounded animal does.

For he had previously made up his mind that he could not return to Daneswood until he had at least seen Christine, and here he found himself driving to the station with no change in his position, and no idea what explanation to offer the household.

But, in fact, though he only conjectured such to be the case, no explanation would have been really accepted.

The servants, as well as the neighbourhood, had formed their own conclusions, and the gossip Delmar had dreaded went glibly round.

He had some papers with him, but could not read them; he made the effort, for very pride's sake—but pride had, even in this small thing, to yield.

He laid them aside and sat looking out on the familiar country, each minute, as the train sped onwards, intensifying his power to feel, lessening his power to think.

Failure, failure, from first to last—revenge that had looked so alluring—that was to have been the dear sustainer and compensation, had brought with it such terrible gifts that its beauty had turned to hideousness. Even this very day he had been conquered by the one being he had thought he could mould to his will, and conquered not by her higher, but by her lower nature.

Between himself and his wife stood his enemy, who had frustrated all his efforts to communicate with her. And yet it was not this side of his retrospect that seemed breaking the proud man's heart—not the failure he must take from others, but the failure he had wrought himself.

Like an inevitable fate the train rushed on through the sunlit country, peaceful and fair, and late in the afternoon drew up at Knights Millwood.

Delmar was out of the carriage before the train had stopped, and came face to face with Evans, to whom he had telegraphed to bring his favourite chestnut.

He waited till Colin was released from his durance vile, and came rushing up to him, caroused him, and then became aware the servant was waiting.

"Is there anything else, sir?" asked the man, as Delmar passed out of the station to where a porter held the chestnut. "Mrs. Forster asked me to go a message in the village, and I will fetch your portmanteau as I come back."

"That will do—and, Evans, take Colin with you. The poor beast has been shut up and will like the run." He sprang into the saddle and bent down to take from Evans the light riding-whip the Emperor never felt. "Say," he added, as the man, touching his hat, was going away. "Jim"—the porter—"will bring up the portmanteau—it will delay you to fetch it, and I may want you. No, Colin, not with me."

The dog hesitated, divided between his love for his master and his knowledge that with Evans he would get a longer run, in which his doggie soul delighted, but another gentle, but firm, "No, Colin," decided him, and he rushed off.

Delmar putting his horse to a walking pace, turned into the tree-shadowed lane which, after many turns, eventuated at the Daneswood gates. The reins hung loose on the Emperor's glossy arched neck, just held in the rider's listless fingers, who was thinking of anything but the still beauty of the hour and scene.

So, till a lonely bit of road was reached, not far from Daneswood, then there came across Delmar's gaze—for he was looking straight before him—the sight of the first human being he had passed since he left the station.

Something in the figure, distant as it was, arrested his attention. He lifted himself from his drooping position and watched the advancing pedestrian—a tall man, who walked slowly, as if tired, and carried a gun.

He came nearer, and, like a flash, Delmar's face changed. The hot blood rushed over it and back again, like fire through every quivering vein.

Up leapt, in its wildest strength, the passion that had only slept that day because other passions had been stronger.

But this now, at sight of the man who had made him what he was, bore down all else—it was his master, and, without an instant's pause or thought, he flung himself from his horse.

Felham Clifford, who had seen the action, recoiled; and well he might before the uncontrolled fury in the other's face.

"At last!" said Delmar, hoarsely. "Answer me now—here—for the wrongs you have heaped on me—"

"Keep back!" said Clifford, stepping away from Delmar. "You are mad to challenge me like that! Think one moment—remember Christine—"

It was a fatal word.

"You have come between us—you are keeping her from me!" Delmar said, half-frantically. "Deny it if you dare!"

"Ay!" cried Clifford, his slower nature roused to the other's fire. "I have—and I will!"

Delmar heard, waited for no more. The words seemed to snap what last remnant of control he might have had. He sprang forward, seizing Clifford in a grasp that rendered him powerless, and twice, thrice drew the riding-whip sharply and savagely across his face.

Blinded and maddened Clifford wrenched himself free, and lifting his gun to his shoulder fired straight and true. He saw the horse start away as the report echoed again and again—he saw Delmar reel back and striving to keep his footing, put out his hands wildly. A mist as of blood came between him and that vision of a white, dying face, and then he was kneeling on the long grass, and saw nothing in heaven or earth but the prostrate form at his feet.

He was paralysed and helpless. He could not even call for aid; he forgot his sportsman's flask which he always carried; he could only lay the bright head on his knee and make some effort to staunch the fast-flowing blood that was dying the long, cool grass.

"Oh, Heaven!" he said, at last, "he is dying! Albert, look up," but there was no answer. "Albert," again, this time in an agonised whisper, "only once, for Maddie's sake!"

Breathlessly he bent lower. What strange spell had that name to call back the dying spirit out of the dark shadows that were closing around it? It seemed to pause, to stand still, as if it waited. Not slowly but suddenly the white lids were lifted, and the blue eyes looked straight upwards with a long, straining, unearthly gaze. The rigid lips just moved; so faint was the scarcely-breathed word that left them the listener barely caught it—"Christine!"

A wild, sharp cry that startled himself, a rushing sound, and then a shaggy form bounded up, and a man's voice exclaiming in horror. These were what Pelham Clifford saw and heard after what seemed to him like hours of unconsciousness.

"He is dead," he said, not moving.

"Get your flask, sir!" asked Evans, not wasting words; and kneeling down poured a few drops of wine between Delmar's lips. It had not the slightest effect. Evans asked no questions, but bidding Clifford do what he could to check the flow of blood ran off to the house at full speed. But Colin would not follow him. After licking his master's hand and whining pitifully, he had laid down close beside him, watching him, not deigning to notice Pelham beyond one rather unfriendly glance. There was, to the wretched man, something eerie in the faithful brute's silent guard.

Clifford was a passive spectator of all that followed, yet noticed the most minute particulars—one of the men catch Emperor's bridle and pick up the riding-whip and the fatal gun. Nobody asked him any questions nor made any remark save Evans, who merely said, pityingly, "It's a terrible accident, sir," and Pelham assented.

Then they would not think him a murderer. He breathed more freely, lifted his head, and ventured to glance round.

It was Evans who assumed the command of his assistants, which Clifford ought to have taken. They reached the house by slow degrees; fortunately it was not far, and, arrived there, Pelham would not go upstairs. He ascertained the doctor had been sent for and would arrive almost directly, and went into the dining-room, where a servant waited on him, explaining that Mrs. Forster was busy upstairs. Then he was left alone till the same servant came to say the doctor would like to see him. Tremblingly Pelham obeyed the summons in a dull, nerveless dread that recalled his paralysed feeling of an hour ago. As if he were entering a death-chamber he stepped into the wide, airy room, full of light and bright with pretty things; close up to the low, white bed, on the other side of which the doctor sat.

Mrs. Forster respectfully made way for her

brother. Clifford stood looking down on the face so changed already—it might have been cut out in marble; the pencilled brows stood out sharply defined; the long lashes looked almost black against the deathly pallor of the softly curved cheek; the lips, the hands, were bloodless. There was not the faintest movement, not the slightest breath to show that he lived. Clifford would have liked to cry out, but he could not; he was too oppressed, too dazed, and, besides, that was so like a dead face.

"Impossible he can live," a voice grew out of the blackness saying those awful words, and a woman's voice answered, mournfully, "My poor mistress!"

With a cry of agony Clifford sank down, and burst into tears.

"Christine! Christine! my darling!" he sobbed. "Oh, how will you look at me! What will you say?"

"Dear Mr. Clifford," said the good old house-keeper, gently, "it's terrible, certain, but who can help an accident! We are all in Heaven's hands."

Again—an accident—no other thought entered anyone's head. Clifford rose, calmer, more himself. Ashamed as he was of his tears, they had relieved him. He could tell the doctor collectedly how it had happened. He had been shooting, and had left his party to return by train to the house where he was staying, carrying his gun on full cock in case any rabbits came across him, as he knew he was on his brother-in-law's land. He had met Delmar, and, forgetting this, had handled the gun carelessly, and it had gone off.

The doctor, a clever man, who knew Delmar well, and always attended the household, never doubted a word of the well-told story, and sympathised deeply with the teller of it, the more so as he saw no hope.

"Is Mrs. Delmar in London?" he said. "She had better be telegraphed for—she may get the next train. He may live through the night, but I doubt it. The wound is so near vital parts. I have stopped the bleeding, but I cannot get back consciousness. He has lain like that ever since he was brought home. He speaks, you say, once!"

"Once—only one word. Will he—will he never speak again?"

"I can't tell. Very little can be done at present. Of course I shall stay the night. Mrs. Forster will kindly send for Mrs. Delmar."

"No, I will see to that," said Clifford, hastily. He turned gladly from the sight of the silent form and changeless face, gladly sought relief in action; and, veiling his eyes, went out, and the message was flashed off to Christine, waiting in London in a nameless apprehension.

Mrs. Forster went to make preparations for her mistress, and Dr. Hall was left in the darkening room with his dying patient—alone, save for the hound, who had never left the room since his master had been brought into it, and now lay beside the bed, watchful and listening.

CHAPTER XXIII.

The servants were gathered in the kitchen discussing the events of the afternoon. Evans had gone to the station to meet the train by which Christine was expected, and Mrs. Forster, alone in her own room, was preparing something the doctor had ordered.

A great hush had fallen over the house—even Clifford's incessant movement from drawing-room and dining-room to garden, and back again, was not heard, and not a sound from the room upstairs. The bird in the cage had ceased its song, and stood drooping on its perch; and without the evening had fallen so still and brooding that scarcely a leaf stirred.

Mrs. Forster started as the glass door leading to the garden was opened gently, and then, in utter amazement, dropped the spoon she was using. A girl's slender form she could not mistake stood before her, and yet she thought her senses must have cheated her as she went towards her, holding out both her hands. The look on that young face went to her heart. The re-

strictions of rank were swept down, and the mistress clung to the servant.

She was a child, quivering under the sorrow that was so strange because so new, and the woman who held her so lovingly, her comforter by right of years and experience. If comfort could be given.

Christine lifted herself to whisper,—

"Is he alive?"

"Yes, my dear; and thank Heaven you are come. Let me take off your hat before you go up. I have but just sent Evans to meet you."

"I could not wait for the train—it was half-an-hour. I had a special, and the station-master drove me over. Where have you—?"

"Where is the master? In your own old room—because, you see, I always kept that ready in case either of you came back suddenly. And it's so handy having the dressing-rooms near. Shall I tell Mr. Clifford you are come?"

Christine's pale face changed colour.

"No," she said; "I will go to him presently. I'll go up now, Mrs. Forster."

Her soft young lips pressed the old house-keeper's cheek gratefully, and she went out past the drawing-room door, and up the wide stairway, shadowy in the gloaming, for no one had thought to light the lamp. It was all so familiar as if she had never left it.

Oh, if she never had! She went softly into the room, closing the door noiselessly, but Colin heard the sound—he had been sitting erect for minutes before—and as she entered came up to her, not boisterously as usual, but slowly waving his tail and pushing his nose into her hand. His delight was only expressed through the medium of his loving eyes.

It was not dark here—no shadows, all the clear amber-light of an autumn sunset filling the room. But how still—how deathly still!

Silently Christine met Dr. Hall, who had risen as he saw her, and gave him her hand without a word—nay, with her eyes turned towards the bed. He only pressed her hand, experienced enough to see that a word just now was more than she could bear. Then she went to the bedside.

Such a mere girl to look as if her heart were breaking, and yet to be so painfully quiet—to put back the loose waves of golden hair with touch so unutterably tender, to lay such trembling lips on the white brow, and yet to shed no tear and speak no word. She seemed as if she could not leave him—as if she had recovered some treasure, and to go from it would be giving up life. Had she, then, forgotten her wrongs—forgotten that she had said forgiveness would be shame? Was he again exalted into the hero he had been to her once just because he lay dying? No, memory was only too keen and clear—but washed pure of all bitterness; nor was he a hero—only the man she loved, who needed her, who might never again by word or look bridge over the space between them. To die so—to leave her not one tender thought of him. She looked up to the physician with a question that spoke plain without words. His face answered her, and she bent down again, this time with whispered words she could not control—"Oh Heaven, don't take him from me—not like this! Give us a little more time—to be happy a little while!"

She raised herself suddenly, and in an instant had forced herself into a calmer manner. She listened while Dr. Hall explained to her the injury and the almost entire absence of grounds for hope—the loss of blood alone, he said, had been enough to kill a man with less vitality. She noticed that he made no arrangements as to further advice or assistance—never asked her as to her nursing capabilities, and drew her own mournful conclusions. She could ask him without a falter how many hours he gave for life to run out, could hear in the same way his answer: "I fear not beyond the morning." And he will never wake—never know us!" she said.

"I can't be sure—if he does, probably it will be only just before death. But he is in Heaven's hands."

"Yes," said Christine, mechanically. She had not lost her faith—she knew the words to be sincerely said, but her heart was numb—the

all sweetness those words contained had not penetrated it. She sat down by the bedside, refusing to take food. It might be a long watch the doctor said. "Presently," she answered, gently, "I can't now," and added, with an effort to smile, "I shall be stronger soon—I suppose the telegram shocked me, and seeing Albert."

She rested her head against the pillow, and the darkness began to settle down on the room. Then Mrs. Foster came quietly in, lighted the wax tapers, lowered the blinds, and going out, returned immediately, carrying a cup of tea to her mistress. Christine never knew how she swallowed it, but when the task was got through she could feel its effects. She learned that Fanny, who was to follow her, had already arrived, and that Mr. Clifford had asked if she (Christine) had come. Dr. Hall had left the room with the housekeeper to take some refreshment, and Christine was alone, save for the dog, who could not be got to stir.

She grew strangely strong in that half weird watch, which Death seemed to share with her like another personality. She heard hushed sounds in a dreamy way—stealthy footsteps past the door, or a faint ring of a bell below, perhaps a voice in low tones—but she lived in another world. Nothing had any reality but the motionless form beside her—no sound was so distinct as the footfall that drew nearer and nearer.

Dr. Hall came back, looked at his patient, and told Christine that her brother was anxious to see her, but she shook her head. "Not now," she said, and the doctor took up his old place. She could not tear herself away—some irresistible attraction would have drawn her feet back. No matter what Pelham thought—she so unselfish, had forgotten that there breathed any but one being in the whole world.

The time slipped by—the house grew still, as all but one or two went up to bed. Once or twice Dr. Hall tried again if the wounded man had any power even to take restoratives; once, by his order, Christine made the effort. She had always attended the servants when they were ill, and told her companion she had been in the habit of nursing her sick school-fellows in Germany.

He answered, smiling, he knew she was not quite a novice. But there was not the movement of an eyelid till long after twelve; then Christine, lifting her head, rose suddenly, with a thrill at her heart that made her half sick.

"Dr. Hall," she said, "do you think he is quite so unconscious?" He looked so quiet—now as if he suffered. And this hand has moved—it was so," indicating the position.

They watched him breathlessly for a minute, the brows had knitted a little, the lips were less rigid. Obedient to a look, Christine once more tried to give the restorative, then waited. But there was no further change, and Fanny coming in with a message from Clifford soon after, Dr. Hall went to speak to her, while Christine sank back to her old position.

Then it was, just upon one, that that long, deadly sleep was broken. The first sound that grew on him was the low voices at the other end of the room—faint and far away they seemed; and he lay listening wondering vaguely where he was and who were talking, but feeling too shattered to even open his eyes, and pain, too, kept him still—a dull, burning sensation that intensified with his deepening consciousness and made him afraid to try to move.

Languidly at last he opened his eyes, and slowly the familiar features of the room became apparent. His faculties were too dulled to recall any unhappy associations with it—only he could not understand why he was here, and thought he was dreaming.

It was Christine who first noticed him, and calling Dr. Hall quickly was on her feet. She recoiled for a second—what if the sight of her were too much for him—but it was too late. The dark blue eyes, already dimmed with pain and exhaustion, were looking at her, not with a full recognition, but puzzled and wistful. It were better so, she thought, that he should become accustomed to her whilst his senses were still so clouded that the past was a blank.

Still she did not try to recall her identity too clearly, leaving it to Dr. Hall to speak to him.

She listened with her heart on her lips for the sound of the dear remembered voice—but, alas! it was only the faintest whisper that came to her ear. She could see that he was not satisfied—that something was still unexplained after the inevitable "Where am I?" had been answered. The doctor saw it too.

"Something you want to know?" he asked, "you have told me who I am."

"There was someone else," Delmar whispered back, as if each breath were an effort.

She had drawn back, and her finger was on her lip directly, but Dr. Hall nodded intelligently. He had long had his own opinion as to the state of matters at Danewood, and understood her.

"Yes," he said quietly, "she came as soon as she heard you were ill."

Scarcely breathing, the girl bent forwards. What would he say—would he be glad—would he remember? He seemed struggling to throw off the mists that hampered him. She could not wait till memory had risen up against her.

"Is it Christine?" she heard again the half-inaudible whisper, and the doctor made her a sign. She dared not trust her voice to speak his name even, or her lips to touch his. She only laid on his hand both hers, and the unshed tears blinded her. His look up at her grew more earnest every second, the faintest smile—for in this face all the expressions that had been so vivid were shadowy now—came and went, and he glanced down at the hands covering his. Did he remember? but he did not draw his hand away. It was better than she had ventured to hope; but, ah! how far short of what she longed for! Was there to be no sign of reconciliation—no assurance of her love? Was he to die, shut out and alone? She could not part so—there must be something more. But he had turned his face away from her towards the light, and she dared not disturb him. She loosed his hand gently, and sat down again, struggling with her tears. This was more than the bitterness of death.

The night passed laggingly, or seemed to, because she longed so for the morning—the morning that might bring hope. She had food enough for thought, but her mind could rest on nothing but the chances for and against life. She counted the hours with sickening anxiety, and felt it like a reprieve when each went by.

He lived still, half-unconscious he might be, but it was life, and the night was gone; the light was tingling the window panes, was paling the wax tapers. How dreary it looked, that mingling of lights—even in this luxurious room.

The limits laid down had been passed and the new day had begun. Was it an omen for a new life here on earth, or—Christine could not finish the sentence even in her own mind; it ended in a passionate prayer.

Was he glad she was there? Would he be glad when he gained fuller recollection? What had that earnest look meant? Had those letters she had never seen prayed for pardon? Was it for this he had wanted to see her this day just over?

Ah, how little then had he dreamt it would be like this!

It was broad daylight; below, the ordinary routine of the house was beginning again. Christine started from the musings that had absorbed her, to see Dr. Hall bending over his patient. She came to his side.

"I had not thought it would be so long," he said. "He may go on like this for hours. Now, my dear, you have a trying time before you. You must take food, if not rest."

"I am not tired. I must see Pelham first," she said, "before I can touch anything; then I will obey you, only you must not tell me to leave Albert—I can't!"

"I shall not ask it. You will stand more than the loss of a night's rest. With your permission, I am going to take further advice. I don't want to give you false hopes; but this is an intricate case, and I should like everything possible to be done. I have had a great deal of experience in

these cases, but still I should be more satisfied to have a first-rate opinion."

"I am quite in your hands," she said. "Tell me whom to send for, and I will have it done."

Dr. Hall mentioned the great surgeon, Sir William Beresford, and in ten minutes Evans was riding off to the station with orders to wait for a reply.

Dr. Hall went down to breakfast, carrying a message from Christine to Pelham that she would see him in the course of the morning; and the doctor had hardly come upstairs again when Fanny came in to say that Evans had just returned with a telegram from Sir William, who would be down by the next train.

"That comes in at 10.30," said Christine. "I will go to my brother now, Dr. Hall; I will not be long. Evans is at your orders to take any message home for you."

She had been quietly putting the room in order; that finished, she went out unwillingly, even though there was so much she wanted to learn.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CHRISTINE DELMAR had never stood in more need of that self-control which nature and a carefully cultivated habit had made so strong, than when, that gorgeous October day, she entered the dining-room.

How or where Clifford had spent the night she did not know; but it was plain he had not slept. His eyes were bloodshot, his face drawn, his step unsteady.

He turned sharply as he heard the door open and close, and the brother and sister stood looking at each other till his eyes fell in shame. Just as he had seen her in fancy, when he lay awake and began the work that had finished like this, she stood there—more like a beautiful spirit than a being of flesh and blood.

Her face was perfectly pale, every line of it severely set. There was no light in it; even the large grey eyes had the shadowed look of extreme suffering.

She went forward slowly, drew a chair to the table, and sat down.

"Now, tell me the truth," she said.

It was not what he had looked for, if he knew quite what he had expected. It was impossible, he had said to himself, during the long night when he had fancied every step was here, and she would tell him hope was done with—it was utterly impossible she could meet him in the loving way that had never failed since they were children.

Yet, when the moment came, and, without a smile, even a look of welcome, she quietly put aside the fiction every one else believed, and demanded the truth, he was cut to the heart. He had lied to her once, because he feared to lose her love; that must be gone now, and, besides, he could not lie to her in the proudly borne grief that he had laid on her.

"You shall know it all," he said huskily.

"Only tell me first how he is! Is there hope?"

"No."

"None? But there must be!" he cried, wildly. "I cannot be his murderer, and yours!"

That despairing cry shook her; her lips gave, she dropped her head on her hands.

"Tell me quickly," she said, falteringly. "I don't think I can bear much; and you must go back to Maddie. She knows so little, and she is so easily upset; she will be ill if she is alone. You can come back again if he might ask for you."

"For me! I could not bear it! and yet, if he would only say once he forgives all the wrong I have done him! I never cared for that till now. I never thought how deep an injury I had done; but now that he is dying, by my hand—oh, Heaven! by my hand—it will kill me!"

He sank on the couch covering his face. Christine lifted her head quickly, half rose, as if to go to him, and then sat down again slowly, with trembling limbs.

"What wrong?" she asked, indistinctly.

"What wrong, save the last, has he to forgive in you? Pelham, in mercy, tell me quickly; each minute away from him is like an eternity."

"The deepest wrong one man can do to another, save one."

"The deepest wrong? I don't understand."

"You said once," answered Clifford, still with his face half-hidden, "that it was all misery—misery, and it is; and I have done it all. It was I who tempted Maddle away, when he had gone—I, who ought to have died first. But I hated him then; he had always been my rival in everything—whatever we both tried for he passed me, and I was glad to supplant him for once. Now I wish to Heaven I had never seen her."

She sprang up, no longer trembling, but erect. "You betrayed trust—you whom I thought the soul of honour! Not for Heaven's sake, tell me this is false!"

There was in her voice such acute agony that it seemed as if an assassin must wreck her last vestige of control; but how do we any of us know what we can bear till it comes! We wait with dread for the coming wave, and it comes and goes and we still stand erect—we are not beaten down.

So when Pelham answered by just raising his hueless face and hiding it again, Christine was not powerless, not overwhelmed; she only looked her hands above her head, with the low, heart-broken words,—

"There is no more I can suffer! You—you, I loved you so!"

"And, still," cried Clifford, springing up. "Oh, Christine!"

He fell back, as she half put out her hand. There was silence, which Christine broke.

"So Albert spoke the truth after all; and you sheltered your betrayal of trust, your tarnished honour by telling me Maddle was the tempter. Ah, he was right when he told me never 'again to trust man or woman.' I have been so bitterly disappointed." She sat down again, wearily. "Now tell me the rest."

"Christine, you despise me so much! I am not the first man whom love has led away. Have some pity; don't forsake me utterly because I have failed! Don't judge me by your purity of soul!"

"I am not judging you, nor despising you; I only feel as if love and trust and honour had no meaning. I think they have none for me."

"Christine! Christine! a word like that from you!" said Pelham, turning aside. "But it is my own wretched fault. Well, I will tell you the rest, it is your right. I met Delmar just in the lane that passes the gates to the station—I was going to the train, I suppose he had come from it."

"Yes," she interrupted; "he had been to town to try and find me out. Maddle had seen him."

"Maddle!" said Pelham, hotly. "He saw her?"

She flushed up haughtily.

"Let it pass. Go on!" she said.

"I thought he would pass me, as I meant to do by him; but what you say accounts for his action. He threw himself off his horse—I stopped."

He paused. Christine did not move, save to utter the words,—

"What then?"

Pelham took up the tale again, as a child repeats a hard and hated task. Christine had difficulty at times in hearing all he said.

"I scarcely know what passed—I could not tell at first why he stopped me at all; then I knew."

"How? What did he say?"

"He said I had come between you two, that I was keeping you from him. Then he struck me with the whip he held—I think he hardly knew what he did—and the blow maddened me; then I fired! Christine, I swear to you before Heaven I did not mean to kill him! I was mad—mad!"

Her head sank hopelessly on her folded arms—she gave no other sign; and he dared not comfort her—her bloodstained with the blood that was dear to her!

It was minutes before she moved. She looked

as if months of illness had weighed her down; but what pathetic beauty was in that young face! She spoke feebly, dropping her words out.

"What did he mean by coming between us? You must have mistaken; he must have meant Maddle."

"No, he meant you, and he must have heard about it from her."

"About what?"

"He wrote to you," began Pelham, hesitatingly.

He might well hesitate. She was like another being as she flung back the short curls from her forehead, with a sparkle in her eye, and a burning cheek.

"How do you know? How did Maddle know? She told me yesterday. Where are the letters? There were two!" she said, fiercely.

"Christine, it was for you. Have you forgotten all he has done? I had your wrongs to think of, and yours were mine. I have not read them; but I could not let you go back to him, to suffer again."

She stood there like a beautiful hunted creature with blazing eyes, grasping the back of her chair with shaking hand.

"I am his, not yours; my wrongs are my own, not yours!" she said. "You have come between us—you have taken him from me. Who gave you the right to judge him—to dictate to me—to say he should never be pardoned? No; give your action the right name. Say it was not love for me, but fear lest, going back to him, I should discover this truth you have hidden by flinging the falsehood to him! Those letters! Oh, if I had had them all this might never have been!"

Her passion wavered, changed; she flung herself on her knees by the table, breaking down into dreadful sobs.

"You, who loved me, have wronged me more than he who never loved me; and now he never will. He will never know how I could have forgiven! Oh, Albert, husband, take me with you; I am so awfully alone!"

And her brother dared not even so much as touch her. He was appalled by these racking sobs; yet he stood silent, helpless.

She got up presently, exhausted and drooping.

"Go back to Maddle," she said, "and send me those letters. Come back again as soon as you can."

She turned to the door. He stretched out his hands to her.

"Christine, is this to be the end?"

She looked down earnestly at those white, shapely hands—had he ever needed before to plead to her like this—looked as if she saw blood on them. She shuddered from head to foot.

"Let me go," she said, scarcely articulately.

"I can bear no more!"

Silently he opened the door. She saw him turn back into the room, and throwing himself again on the couch, bury his face in the cushions. One second she lingered, looking at him, then closed the door softly, and flitted upstairs, more like the shadow of herself than the bright girl who had trod them first a year ago.

There seemed but one place for her now—just for one minute to steady herself before she went back to the sick-room—crouching before the crucifix that had so often looked down on her grief, so seldom on her joy; but there had been no grief like this.

She could not pray—it was all such confusion, such darkness; but a thought grew out of the stillness that calmed her—that One trod beside her this weary, tangled path.

(To be continued.)

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FACETIE.

He: "Man proposes—what's the rest of it?"
She: "But is not always accepted."

"Pa, did you know me long before you married her?" "No, my boy, I didn't know her until long after."

THE HEAVY TRAGEDIAN: "And right in the middle of my soliloquy I was struck by an idea."
The Low Comedian: "Only an idea!"

He: "What we want is a member who can talk." She: "Certainly; and yet you are opposed to women holding office."

"Do you find people generally pretty civil?" asked an insurance agent of a bill-collector. "Oh, yes, indeed," answered the latter; "they nearly always ask me to call again."

He: "Nellie, just look at that man standing behind me. I don't think I ever saw anyone so plaid!" She: "Hush, dear; you forget yourself!"

YOUNG MOTHER: "Wake up! Quick! Quick! You must run for the doctor." Young Father: "Eh! What's the matter?" Young Mother: "Baby has stopped smiling in her sleep."

MISS WORTH: "It's considered impolite to give jewellery to a girl to whom you are not engaged." Mr. Strong: "By whom?" Miss Worth: "By all the other girls."

SCRIBBLER: "My new book will soon be published. I hope you will lose no time in reading it." Miss Cutting: "Indeed I won't. I lost several hours reading your other one."

He (preparing to leave): "I assure you, Miss Sweet, the time has passed very pleasantly this evening." She (abstractedly): "Yes, it is pleasant to know that it is past."

FATHER (calling from the head of the stairs at 1.30 a.m.): "Fannie!" Fannie: "Yes, papa; what is it?" Father: "I wish you would ask that young man where he would like to have his trunk put when it comes."

NOTTING: "How can you sit here with that Mrs. Chaffer playing on that confounded piano of hers in the next flat?" Hester: "Oh, I enjoy it. It reminds me that she is Chaffer's wife. I hate Chaffer, you know."

He: "Do you remember the night I proposed to you?" She: "Yes, dear." "We sat for one hour, and you never opened your mouth." "Yes; I remember, dear." "Believe me, that was the happiest hour of my life."

MR. DE CLUB: "My dear, a great German physician says women require more sleep than men." Mrs. De C.: "Does he?" Mr. De C.: "Yes, my dear—um—er—you'd better not wait up for me to-night."

"What will happen to you if you are good, little boy?" asked the kindly old lady. "I'll get a sugarstick." "And what will happen to you if you are bad?" "I'll get two sugarsticks for promising to try to be good."

YOUNG FATHER: "Hullo there, nurse, what's the baby crying like that for? I can't read at all." Nurse: "He's cutting his teeth, sir." Young Father: "Well, just see that he doesn't do it any more, or you'll lose your place."

"You can't spell long words like hippopotamus and parallelogram," said the little boy who wore spectacles and a sailor suit. "Well," answered the boy who was leading a dog by a piece of rope, "dat's where I'm lucky. I don't have to."

"What if I were one of those husbands, my dear, who get up crole in the morning and bang things about and make a hubbub because the coffee is cold?" "John," responded his wife, "I would make it hot for you." As her words admitted of more than one interpretation, John said nothing more about coffee.

FOREIGN TOURIST (gazing at the throng in the streets): "It does not seem possible that your country can assimilate all these strange people." American: "Have no fear. Five or six years from now they'll be voting for President, and in ten or twelve years they'll be shouting 'America for Americans!'"

AN Irish peasant, seeing a partridge that was shot fall from a considerable height, picked it up, and running with it to the sportsman who had killed it, cried out, "Arrah, your honour, you need not have shot it—the fall would have killed him."

PAPA: "Now, Johnny, I have whipped you only for your own good. I believe I have only done my duty. Tell me, truly, what do you think yourself?" Johnny: "If I should tell you what I think, you'd give me another whipping."

PAPA: "See the spider, my boy, spinning his web. Is it not wonderful? Do you reflect that, try as he may, no man could spin that web?" Johnny: "What of it? See me spin this top! Do you reflect that, try as he may, no spider could spin this top!"

OLD MR. DADKINS: "Ar-r-r! So I have caught you kissing my daughter, have I?" Young Mr. Cooley: "I trust there is no doubt about it, sir. The light is quite dim, and I should feel vastly humiliated if it should turn out that I had been kissing the cook."

A PRIVATE soldier walking arm-in-arm with his sweetheart met his sergeant when about to enter a cheap restaurant. He respectfully introduced her to him, "Sergeant, my sister." "Yes—yes," was the reply. "I know; she was mine once."

"What is the matter?" asked a waiter, seeing dissatisfaction on a customer's face. "Wasn't the dinner cooked to suit you, sir?" "Yes, all but the bill," replied the customer. "Just take that back and tell them to boil it down a little."

"PAPA, are generals brave men?" asked Johnny of his father. "Yes, my son, as a rule," was the answer. "Then why do artists always make pictures of 'em standing on a hill three miles away, looking at the battle through an opera-glass?"

FELLER spoke, disrespectfully of my sister; said he'd bet she had a squint, and so I walked in." "Has your sister a squint?" inquired the reporter. "Hain't got no sister," was the reply. "It was the principle of the thing what I got licked for."

"GOOD MORNING," says an acquaintance to a stout friend, who is blowing and steaming with great speed along the footpath. "Training for a walk?" "No," puffs the stout friend, turning his bulging eyes neither to the right or left; "I'm walking for a train."

"THIS is just my luck!" said the gloomy man at the theatre. "Here's a performance going that's so bad it's agonising to witness, and it's the first time in six months that I haven't had a woman with a bath-tub hat in front of me when I've been to the theatre."

ACKERS: "Well, how am I to-day, doctor?" Dr. Healey: "You are doing very well; very well indeed. You may sit up for a while to-day." Ackers: "Thank you, doctor; that is good news. By the way, may I inquire what your bill is?" Dr. Healey: "Presently, presently! You are not so strong yet as you think."

BIG BROTHER: "I should like to know what you've been flirting with that fool Saphend for!" Pretty Sister (indignantly): "I haven't." "Yes, you have. He told a friend you stood before him for ten minutes as if entranced, and you looked straight into his eyes as if you would read his very soul, and he said it ever ardent admiration shone in a human face, it did in yours." "Huh! The fool! I was looking at my own reflection in his eye-glasses."

MISTRESS: "Jane, I've mislaid the key of my secretaire. I wish you'd just fetch me that box of odd keys. I dare say I can find one to open it." Jane: "It's no use, ma'am. There isn't a key in the 'ouse as 'll fit that desk."

SHE had been chiding him, and began her peroration by saying: "As far back as I can remember, you—" "Oh, hold on!" he interrupted; "let's stick to the nineteenth century, anyway." The lawyers are now trying to get the trouble patched up without carrying it into the courts.

A CLERGYMAN was in his library one day preparing his Sabbath discourse. He paused frequently to review what he had written, and would often erase a word or sentence and substitute another, and his five-year-old son, who was watching him, asked,—"Papa, does God tell you what to preach?" "Certainly, my son," was the reply. "Then why do you scratch it out?" queried the little observer.

REPORTER: "Pardon me, but I have called to inquire if there is any truth in the rumour that you are to be married in St. Paul's Church next Tuesday morning, to Mr. Bangup!" Great Actress: "I do not know the gentleman." "What? Not know Mr. Bangup? Why, his name has been coupled with yours for the past two years." "Yes, I know, but I have not met him yet."

HIS GRACE is famous for an aristocratic unpunctuality in keeping his social engagements. Dining out on New Year's eve, he chanced to arrive for once in good time, but on the way to the drawing-room a boy in buttons somehow managed to get in the visitor's way, with the result that Snook accidentally tripped him up. "Why, Duke," said his hostess, as he entered, "what delightful punctuality! Have you turned over a new leaf at last?" "My dear lady, I have done better than that," was the response. "I have only this moment turned over a whole page."

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SOCIETY.

THE Duchess of Coburg is residing at the Ehrenburg Palace, at Coburg, and will stay there until the middle of May. The duchess is to pay a long visit to Russia this year, and will stay for some time in Roumania.

THE Prince of Wales is to hold the third Levee at St. James's Palace on Friday, May 5th; while the fourth will be held by the Duke of Connaught on Monday, May 29th, a most inconvenient date for official men, as the Whitsuntide recess will not then have finished. There is to be a fifth and last Levee in June, which will be held by the Prince of Wales.

THE German Empress is a splendid cook, and also such an expert dressmaker that she is able, at any time, herself to direct the altering of her costumes, which is carried out in workrooms specially arranged for the purpose in the palace in Berlin; and her mother-in-law, the Empress Frederick, is also a model housewife, and during the last illness of her husband, the late Emperor Frederick, would herself constantly see to the cooking of his food.

THE German Emperor intends to go to Wiesbaden at the end of May, where he has arranged to meet the King of Denmark, when there is a prevalent idea that the matter of the Brunswick succession will at last be definitely settled. It is thought that Prince George of Cumberland will be made King of Hanover. The settlement of this vexed question has hung fire for so long that it may quite well continue to do so, all reports to the contrary notwithstanding.

THE vault of the Stuarts, at the south-east corner of the roofless Chapel Royal at Holyrood, has now been fittingly renovated by direction of the Queen, at whose instance the remains of "her Stuart ancestors" were recently and reverently collected and entombed. The inscription on the light oaken door which now protects the entrance to the vault is of exceptional interest. It sets forth that here lie the remains of David II., James II., Queen Mary of Gueldres; Arthur, third son of James IV.; James V., his Queen, and second son; and of Darnley.

THE new Royal yacht is now approaching completion, and it is likely that Princess Henry of Battenburg will perform the ceremony of christening it. Although the Queen has not yet finally decided on its name, she has expressed her approval of "The Balmoral." The decorations are most elaborate. The Royal shield which is fixed in the stern is a work of art, in which delicate colouring, together with a profusion of gold, figures largely. It is no less than three feet in diameter. The Royal Arms are on the stern, in which there is a beautifully carved rose, shamrock, and thistle; a gold fringe carved in mahogany, together with a cable, also gilt, encircles the sides of the vessel.

THE finest pearl necklace in the world is said to be that of the Countess Henckel, a well-known lady in Paris society. It is composed of three necklaces, each of which was famous in its day. One of them, known as "the necklace of the Virgin of Atoka," was sold to the Countess by a Spanish grandee for £12,000. Another was the property of the ex-Queen of Naples, the sister of the late ill-fated Empress of Austria. The third was the celebrated necklace of the ex-Empress Eugénie, which was worn by her on State occasions, and which was sold not long ago by a firm of London jewellers for £20,000. The value of the Countess Henckel's necklace at the present time is estimated at £50,000.

THE Queen stays at Olinx until the 26th or 27th inst., and will then return direct to Windsor, unless her Majesty decides to go to Coburg for the inauguration of her brother-in-law's statue on May 3rd. In this case the Queen's arrival at Windsor will be deferred until May 5th or 6th. Duke Ernest's statue is being erected in the market-place at Coburg, close to Theod's fine statue of Prince Albert, which the Queen unveiled on August 26th, 1865. The Emperor William, the Kings of Saxony and Württemberg, the Grand Dukes of Baden and Saxe-Weimar, and the Grand Duke Michel Nicolaievitch are expected at Coburg for this function.

STATISTICS.

THERE are still 800,000 people who speak Welsh.

A GOOD railway engine will travel about 1,000,000 miles before it wears out.

OVER 1,000 persons die of delirium tremens in this country every year.

OF the whole population of the globe about 90,000 die every day.

GREAT BRITAIN controls 2,570,926 square miles of territory in Africa, on which dwell 41,000,000 inhabitants.

GEMS.

BEHAVIOUR is a mirror in which everyone displays his image.

NO man is living as God means that he should who is not living to help others to live.

THE situation that has not its duty, its ideal, was never yet occupied by man.

THERE are indubitable evidences that the good in the world is stronger than the evil; a great, slow, steady progress of the good, forever gaining on the evil.

MORAL energy grows with the obstacles against which it is measured; and the putting forth of moral energy as the purpose of our lives is the highest exemplification of humanity. When we put forth the highest moral energy, then we touch the years of life.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

SAUCE FOR ROAST BEEF.—Brown one tablespoonful of butter and add to it one tablespoonful of flour and brown together; then add one and one-half teaspoonfuls of Worcester's sauce, and one can of mushrooms; salt and pepper to taste. Cook five or ten minutes and serve.

LOBSTER CUTLETS.—Pick the meat from the shell and pound in a mortar with one ounce of butter; season with salt and pepper to taste. When this is beaten to a smooth paste, shape it into cutlets; dip in beaten egg and then in bread-crumbs, and fry in boiling lard nearly ten minutes. Drain the cutlets well before serving. Garnish the dish with a short piece of the small claw and rings of hard-boiled eggs and serve with bechamel sauce.

WHITE SAUCE.—TO BE SERVED WITH CROQUETTES.—One-half pint of hot milk or cream, or half water and half milk. Into a granite saucepan put one tablespoonful of butter and stir until it bubbles, being careful not to let it brown. Now add one tablespoonful of cornflour or one and one-half of flour, and stir rapidly until it is mixed; then add a little of the cream and stir briskly as it thickens. When perfectly smooth add the rest of the hot cream and cook until very thick. Season with salt and white pepper to taste. Just as you take it from the fire add a beaten egg and a teaspoonful of chopped parsley.

VEAL LOAF.—Three and one-half pounds of veal, fat and lean, and one slice of salt pork ground together until very fine, six or eight snowflake crackers rolled fine, two eggs well beaten. A piece of butter the size of an egg, one tablespoonful of salt, one tablespoonful of pepper (red and black mixed), one teaspoonful of nutmeg, and one teaspoonful of onion juice. Mix thoroughly with your hands, and work it all together, and mould into the shape of an oval loaf. Press firmly and pack into a dripping-pan. Sprinkle bread-crumbs over it, put two or three small bits of butter and a thin slice of breakfast bacon on top and bake slowly two hours. Add half-cup of hot water and baste often. Slice when cold.

MISCELLANEOUS.

THE Kurds and Cossacks believe that Mount Ararat is guarded by an unearthly being, and that no man can ascend the peak and live.

THE nests of the boya bird of India is ingeniously illuminated. This little bird fastens fireflies to it with moist clay, and in the night it glows with changeful sparks.

PERHAPS the finest mausoleum in existence is that in Agra, India, which was built by the Emperor Shah Jehan for himself. It was twenty-two years in course of erection, and on it 20,000 men were constantly employed during that period. The cost was £800,000.

VIENNA has organised a club of rich young men who are pledged to marry poor girls. Should one of them break his pledge and marry a wealthy bride, he must pay \$2,000 to the club. This sum is to be given to some impecunious couple who are about to marry.

VERY early in the morning is generally supposed to be the most common time for death to take away the sick. Old nurses will tell you that from two to four o'clock life is at its lowest ebb, and the dying patient usually passes into the great beyond between these hours. A famous French physician, however, has examined over 25,000 cases of death and finds that more deaths occur at two o'clock in the afternoon than at any other time.

A living tree gives out perceptible warmth in a dense forest. The surface is covered with snow, and its roots, even those that are nearest the surface, are in unfrozen soil, and even in the coldest weather send tiny veins of sap up to the tree as the promise of what spring shall bring. Thus each tree gives out a little warmth, and each helps not only itself, but all the trees near it. Rivals as these trees are in summer, each one trying to get the most foothold and the most sunlight, they are far more companionable and friendly in winter, when common adversity has hard hit them all.

THE Paris Exposition of 1900 will be the means of bringing about the restoration of the Palace of Versailles, and the even more famous Trianon. Three hundred thousand francs have been voted by the French Parliament for renovations of these royal abodes, which in their restored condition will constitute one of the lasting monuments of the Exposition. The famous crystal gallery, where the Kaiser's grandfather was proclaimed emperor, will be renovated, the orangerie will be repaired, and the façades of the palace facing the park, now thoroughly dilapidated, will all be, as far as possible, restored to their condition of former beauty.

OF the 650,000,000 tons of coal, which constitute the entire world's supply, one-third is taken from the coal mines of the United States. The British Isles produce 218,000,000 tons, Germany 124,000,000, and the other European nations make up, in a few million tons each, the rest. Spain contributes but 20,000,000 to the sum total, which amount is not sufficient for even home consumption. China, though rich in natural deposits, mines but little of her coal, because of her use of primitive methods. It is prophesied that the introduction of British mechanical appliances in Chinese fields will send up her coal supply at least 25 per cent.

ORNAMENTS made from the kukui nuts are worn by the Hawaiian women. The nuts are pierced so the ants can eat out the meat, otherwise they would burst from the generated gas. Then they bury the nuts in the mud of the taro patch until they become like jet or bogwood. After that they are laboriously polished by hand, the final gloss being given by rubbing with bread-fruit leaves. The native jewellers have become very clever at engraving these nuts, inlaying them with gold and silver and mounting them in many artistic ways. In the curio stores are also seen yards of tiny rice-shaped white shells, sometimes called Queen Emma's pearls. The holes in these made by rubbing them one at a time against rock.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

Z. Y. X.—Submit the will to counsel.
RATEPAYER.—Every ratepayer has a vote.
E. G.—We do not answer legal questions.
H. L.—If so, he has no claim against them.
MAMIE.—The society is quite unknown to us.
N. M.—It does not strike us as at all excessive.
LAS MINERABLE.—Divorce could not be obtained.
A. M. G.—It must be re-registered every five years.
SIXTER-IN-LAW.—The husband's goods can be taken.
AGGIE.—The best woods to use are chestnut or lime.
RONAWAY GIRL.—As legal as if performed at church.
GAY SPARK.—We do not give help in guessing competitions.
POST.—Sir Alfred Austin is the present poet laureate of England.
ROSEBRIAR.—You had better take it first to some dealer to value.
ROWAN.—The husband would take the whole if she did not leave a will.
L. A.—Rubbing in a little lard, which should be free from salt, might answer.
GROWING OLD.—Natural wrinkles such as you describe cannot be removed.
G. B.—The proper way is to mix only as much as is required for use at the time.
Y. F. G.—You might obtain some information at the London Agency of Oape Colony.
T. A. K.—The French and Spanish used war-galleys as late as the eighteenth century.
IS SOME TAQUILL.—An untried prisoner on remand is allowed to wear his own clothes.
INDIGNANT.—As there was no written agreement you had better comply with the notice.
ENGAGED LARKE.—An engagement of one year's standing is by no means a long one.
PEELER.—It is possible that you may get the information by applying at the police office.
IN NEED OF HELP.—Impossible to judge without having the whole history of the case.
OCKLEY.—A copy of the will can be seen at Somerset House on payment of a shilling fee.
MALCOLM.—We say, without hesitation, that South Africa is decidedly preferable of the two.
ALFRED.—At present South Africa is more progressive than South Australia, and the fare is less.
CARL.—Impossible to marry your wife's niece; that would expose you to a criminal prosecution.
ZUTDER-ZEE.—Webster's Dictionary gives the Dutch pronunciation of Zuyder-Zee as "Zolder-Ze."
WORRIED MOTHER.—Even if it is proved that your son broke the window glass you cannot be compelled to pay for it.
MOTHER OF TEN.—Suet crust for boiled puddings is both excellent and nourishing if mixed with milk, or milk-and-water.
IGORAMUR.—A book is copyrighted to prevent its contents from being used by other persons; it is not necessary for its sale.
CHRISTINE.—Bathe it with ammonia diluted with water, and keep covered with flannel bandage kept moist with the ammonia and water.
ONE OF THE FAMILY.—Until the father's relations are quite exhausted to the remotest degree, the mother's cannot come in for any share.
POOLIE.—Chopping should never be done on a pastry board. A special one, or a thick wooden box-lid even, should be kept for the purpose.
MUSICAL.—Yellow piano keys may be whitened by brushing them over with a mixture of half an ounce of nitric acid and five ounces of soft water.
W. S.—Wash them well, peel, and throw them into boiling, salted water; allow them to boil for a quarter of an hour to twenty minutes if of good size.
EMIGRANT.—Write to Emigrants' Information Office, 51, Broadway, Westminster, London, S.W., which is established to supply just what you require.
USHER BOB.—The amount of premium varies according to circumstances, and is rather a matter of agreement than in accordance with any fixed rule.
A NERVOUS LOVER.—Surely the most satisfactory way, and we should imagine, the more agreeable to her, would be to speak to the young lady herself.
CONVULSANT READER.—It is quite impossible for us to advise in such a case; it is absolutely necessary to know all particulars before attempting to give an opinion in the matter.
K. G.—First rub them well with a little paraffin oil; put away for a day or two in a dry place, and then rub with finely-powdered unsalted lime. Knives need to be kept in a very dry place. A good plan is to wrap them first in thick brown paper and then in flannel. A piece of old blanket does equally.

DISPUTANT.—From the moment the pilot goes on board he is responsible for the navigation of the ship, but the captain continues responsible for the discipline of the crew.

LITTLE HOUSEKEEPER.—When in doubt as to the probabilities of some meat or poultry, &c., keeping till the next day, parboil or partly roast it, and finish it off when required.

C. P.—If a needle be inserted into the side of a supposed corpse and withdrawn, the hole will remain open if the patient be really dead. But if the patient lives the skin will close up and the hole disappears.

RALLY.—Wash your feet at night in very hot water containing a good quantity of vinegar, or spoonful of carbolic acid; the soft corn is best treated with the corn cushion obtainable from any chemist.

LITTLE BUTTERCUP.—If snow is melted, it becomes drinkable water, and relieves thirst as ordinary water does; but if it is allowed to melt in the month it increases the thirst.

CARISIMA.—Persons in weak health should not remain in Cape Town nor along the coast, but go further inland; the coast is somewhat steamy, therefore not just suited to those afflicted with weak chests.

FRANCIA.—The heel and ball of the foot just behind the toes should in walking strike the ground almost simultaneously, but the heel, as its position and shape must indicate, should be first down.

NOT A SCHOLAR.—Terence was a Roman comic poet, who lived and flourished rather less than two hundred years before the Christian era, but his works have been often translated into all European languages.

LAVENDER.—First scrub well with warm water and soap. Rinse in clear water, and then brush well into every crevice a paste made of whiting and water. Let dry, brush off, and polish with a soft duster.

SWEET MARIE.—There certainly are such fluids sold, but we are afraid to recommend any, as most of them have a deleterious effect upon the hair, and cannot be used without risk of eventually spoiling it.

THOUGHT'S FLIGHT.

Oh, whither, my thoughts, are you flying,
 And why will you make me so sad,
 When you know that by only half trying
 You can make me so hopeful and glad?

Why return to those moments of sorrow—
 Those moments that long since have fled?
 Why not soar with delight to the morrow,
 And taste of its blisses instead?

Why bring to my mind days of pleasure,
 Of pleasure so tempered with pain?
 Why not bring me pure joy without measure,
 And the bliss which this life must contain?

The sun through the heavens is hiding,
 All of earth in its brightness is glad
 But whither, my thoughts, are you flying,
 And why will you make me so sad?

YUM-YUM.—Little can be done in the way of treatment of flat-foot beyond bandaging the waist of the foot carefully in order to keep the bones in position, and, of course, having boots made to suit the arrangement.

ROBERT.—One variety of shark, the baker, frequents shallow water, but is never seen on British coasts; all other species keep in the deep channels; it is only by accident that any kind of shark finds its way into British waters.

CUNIOITY.—An ostrich cannot kick backward. When the time has come for the bird to be despoiled of its feathers, its head is inserted in a bag, and the plucker stands behind its victim. A blow from its foot has vigour enough to kill a man.

WORRIED.—Your sister may quite competently be appointed sole executrix, but as from ignorance of the rules of business she could hardly discharge the duties of the office herself, it may be desirable either to nominate others to act by themselves or with her jointly.

BONANZA.—Bonanza is a Spanish word indicating "fair weather," or "prosperity." In mining it is used to designate a sudden widening or discovery of a vein or deposit of precious metal. Of late years it has become a term popularly applied to any successful venture.

TAUS BLUB.—The "blubber" of the whale, or structure in which the oil is deposited, is the true skin of the animal, modified for the purpose of holding this fluid oil, but still the true skin. It consists of an interlacement of fibres, crossing each other in every direction, as in common skin, but more open in texture, to leave room for the oil.

BAIDOLEY.—First slightly warm the butter to soften, but not to melt it, or have the bowl for mixing warm; then beat the butter and sugar steadily into a cream, and when in that condition begin to add the eggs by degrees, beating one at a time thoroughly well into the creamed butter and sugar; then add the second egg in the same way, and so on till you have them all in, then lightly stir in the flour, in which the baking powder should have been previously well mixed, then stir in the fruit, and bake at once.

OVER THE BORDER.—In Scotland the parties can go to a registrar anywhere with two witnesses, say they have accepted each other, and wish to have the marriage registered; he takes them to a sheriff's chamberlain, and gets necessary warrant, registers the thing, grants certificate or "line," and all is complete.

PAIMOSOT.—Dissolve a large tablespoonful of borax in a pint of boiling water. Mix one-quarter of it in the cold water in which greasy woollen goods are to be washed. Put in one piece at a time, using soap if needed, and if necessary use more of the borax-water. Wash and rinse in cold water. Shake well and hang where the goods will dry quickly.

NAX.—The quickest and cheapest way to disinfect a house is to put a shovelful of live coals out of the fire in the middle of the room, then, having previously stopped up keyholes and all crevices, throw a handful of sulphur on the coals, and promptly retire, closing the door after you; allow the thing to remain for two hours, then enter and lower windows to clear out poisonous fumes.

DOUBTFUL EVE.—It would be well for you to take into consideration the fact that as a rule women of that age are not prone to "passing fancies," nor to falling in love with the impetuously and passion of maidens under twenty. We have no doubt that if your apparently pleasant relations with the gentleman continue, you will discover that you have a true and abiding affection for him.

MADDIE.—Take some slices of cold beef, trim them neatly into the same shape and size, sprinkling each with pepper and salt. Take as many slices of bacon or ham as there are slices of meat, and on the bacon put a little chopped parsley, a teaspoon of anchovy sauce, and a few drops of mushroom ketchup. Now put the meat on a board, on each piece place a slice of the bacon, roll up tightly, and fasten with a small wooden skewer. Dip the rolls into eggs and breadcrumbs and fry in deep fat till a good golden colour. Drain very dry, and serve hot with a garnish of fried parsley.

B. M.—Feather-eating in parrots is practically incurable; when once the bird has contracted the habit it is rarely diverted from it, and in the end death supervenes upon cold caught through the naked condition of the body; turn yours loose in a room if you can; give it neither meat, butter, egg, nor milk in its food, but hemp and canaryseed, maize, and oats, with lettuce, fruit, green peas, and cabbage when available; a bit of sugar now and again, but no salt, and a lot of soft, half-rotten wood to gnaw at; this is the only course that can be followed with hope of success.

EARLY BIRD.—First put as many eggs in a saucepan as you wish to cook, and quite cover them with cold water. Put the saucepan on the fire, let it heat rather quickly; and when it really boils you will find that the eggs are just cooked, and, instead of the white being tough and leathery, as it so often is if they are placed in boiling water, the yolk and white will both be only just nicely set. If you prefer cooking them in boiling water, however, put them in when the water is boiling very fast, and then draw the saucepan a little back, so that the water will only just simmer. Cook for three and a half to four minutes.

HOCKEYKEEPER.—A loose cotton cover over the mattress, made to button neatly at one end, always goes a long way towards keeping it clean. This can be washed and changed as often as need be without much trouble or expense. It is very important to air all the bedding thoroughly. Every article should be daily taken off and laid separately over a chair, and a strong current of air should be allowed to circulate through the room before the clothes are replaced. The mattress should be turned daily from end to end, as this insures it being worn more evenly, and not sinking in the middle.

MARINE.—It was at first called "La Louison," from M. Louis, the eminent surgeon and secretary to the College of Surgeons in Paris, who, in March, 1792, improved the mechanism of an old machine of that kind, which was, in fact, the "maison," formerly used in Scotland, and recommended the instrument as a humane mode of executing criminals. Dr. Galliotine, against whom there was a popular joke about head amputation, was very much annoyed at finding his name superseding that of the real suggester of the instrument. He was, moreover, happy enough not to be one of its victims, for he lived till after the restoration of Louis XVIII. in extensive practice, and much respected, in spite of the sticking association with his name.

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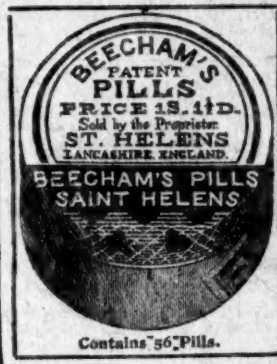
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